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VOL. 1046.

LOVE THE AVENGER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



"True love is sweet."

TENNYSON.

"Point d'amour, et partout le spectre de l'amour."

A. DE MUSSET.

LOVE THE AVENGER.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "ALL FOR GREED."

[Mary P. R. Blake de Bury]

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1869.

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LADY MALLEY

REMEMBRANCE OF LONG YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP
IN TOKEN OF THE HIGHEST ADMIRATION AND IN

BY THE AUTHOR
VOL. I

BY THE AUTHOR

A. A. A.

LEIPZIG

REINHARDT TATCENITZ

1865

THE BIBLE & THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

TO
LADY MALET,

IN TOKEN OF THE HIGHEST ADMIRATION AND IN
REMEMBRANCE OF LONG YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP,

This Book is Dedicated

BY THE AUTHOR,

A. A. A.

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LOVE THE AVENGER.

CHAPTER I.

Alone in Life.

ALMOST in the middle of that wind-swept plain which lies between Blois and Chartres, and dooms to unsightly monotony the central Provinces of France, stands a small village called St. Martin. Within memory of not even the oldest inhabitant, it had been a hamlet, and its present village-state was an evidently transitory one. It was creeping slowly but steadily on to become a town. That would depend upon the precise spots chosen as stations for the railway line, when a certain branch, anxiously waited for, should be completed. For the moment, St. Martin was a village, and, as is usual in even the richest French districts, it was neither a picturesque nor a clean one.

As far as it went, the little place was possessed of all its requisites. It had a mayor with his belongings, a curé, a schoolmaster, a *Garde Champêtre*, and a post-mistress. It could want nothing more, and was certain of being well and sufficiently administered.

The five or six hundred individuals composing the population of St. Martin inhabited a collection of stray

tenements, irregularly dotted about the straight line of road which led from Blois to Tours, and which, looked at from a balloon, would have seemed a mere patch on the broad, flat garment of the plain. On the right-hand side, as you came from Blois, stood the church, a small edifice, terribly out of repair, with its traditional porch, beneath which the peasants congregate on rainy Sundays, and its traditionally crooked spire, bent, as the said peasants believe, by the inexorable north-west winds. On either side of, and opposite to, the church, extended what was called the Street, and, when what the street regarded as its shops came to an end, it led forth towards the open fields, over a bridge, beside which lay the pond, where washerwomen were for ever at work, and merged at length, about a mile further on, into the high-road from Tours to Chartres.

Flat, flat, dreary, bare, uninteresting. That is the traveller's impression as he crosses these monotonous plains, whereon a bush is a prominent feature, and a group of trees what French people call an event. Uninteresting? Yes, to you who pass on and go your way; but to those whose way it is to abide here, full of interest, life-stirring and terrible as any that ever formed the ground-work of historic dramas.

Nearly opposite the little dilapidated church, with its dumb clock, whose rusty hands eternally pointed to half-past three, and whose rusty, arrow-shaped weathercock never swerved from N. N. W., stood a shop with barred door and closed shutters. Upon a broad stripe of dirty white, which extended all round the habitation,

was inscribed in big, black letters, the following legend:—

WIDOW RAYNAL, GROCER AND VINTNER.

The shop formed the corner of the street, inasmuch as, whilst one side of it opened upon the street, the other had its windows upon a small, open space, terminating in a narrow, muddy lane, and the door of the shop itself formed the apex of the uncouth triangle, blunted and flattened by two uneven door-steps of grey stone. Just across the open space we have mentioned (some twenty or thirty yards square) rose a building three stories high, with a smart balcony to its first-floor—a hotel, forsooth! not an inn, or an ale-house, or anything so rustic or unimportant—but a hotel with a bran new sign, on which was blazoned forth, in gold upon bright blue, nothing less than the words, A l'Hôtel de l'Europe.

Europe! Nothing less, it seemed, would suit the magniloquence of this village hostelry, very empty and forlorn to all appearance in the present, but prescient,—who knows?—with yet dormant greatness in a dim railway-to-be-developed future. At all events, the Hôtel de l'Europe looked down crushingly upon its opposite neighbour, the closed shop, very much as a newly made peeress might upon a humble school-fellow, destined to be dropped. Between the two, upon the square space intervening, were to be seen a couple of odd vehicles resting on their shafts; one the half-drag, half-fourgon

like equipage of a commercial traveller, the sole lodger in Europe's hotel; the other, the lumbering, tumble-down conveyance, destined for the transport of travellers to and from Blois, the master of the European resting-place exercising the right of furnishing the relays to the coach, which still, in default of a local railroad, served as about the only means of conveyance between two or three provincial towns.

Yes; the flaunting house of cheer might well look down upon the gloomy house over the way, with its sealed entrances; for behind those closed-up channels of light and life there had passed a miserable series of woful scenes, which would only have been a shade more woful still, had the poor, hard-striving, utterly helpless, and, at last, despairing Widow Raynal, Grocer and Vintner, lived to witness them.

The Widow Raynal had not always been alone and a widow. Her history was that of many of the women of her class, and none the less sorrowful for that.

Some thirty years ago, Claude Raynal, the son of the land-steward of a wealthy proprietor near Chartres, started in life with what was called a good education, very little money, but the protection of his father's employer; and this very protection ruined him. Though his school-gains amounted to what might be deemed little enough, Claude proved, for his particular character, to have too much education and too little money. He was always thinking of enjoyment without labour, and grew to be so convinced that mere protection could

and ought to secure for him all he desired, that when protection either could or would not do what he expected, he regarded himself as an injured man. In the beginning protection acted in his favour, and helped him to his first lift in life, by placing him as unpaid clerk in the *Receveur-particuliers* office; but Claude disliked work and no pay, and refusing the work which was to lead to pay, the pay never came, and protection refused to help him who did not choose to help himself. Well, Claude Raynal tried many things, always with the same object in view—of obtaining more than he paid for—the most marked feature in the dishonesty of our age—and one day, when he was somewhere about five-and-twenty, his father announced to him that he had found a wife for him. The girl was the only child of a well-to-do peasant near Blois, was well brought up, not pretty, and would at her father's death inherit sundry strips and morsels of land—*du bien!* as the people of that class in France call it.

They married and went to live with the peasant father near Blois. They had two or three children, and, in course of time, the two fathers both died, and Claude Raynal and his wife came into the enjoyment of whatever they were to be possessed of. The bits of land ruined them utterly, as land in such conditions ruins many thousands of petty proprietors in France. Claude fancied he had some aptitude for agriculture, and not having land enough to test these aptitudes upon, he borrowed money to buy a bit or two more, and a very short time saw him beggared of almost

everything he possessed. When the irretrievable ruin had set in, then, as invariably happens in such cases, began the martyrdom of the wife. This endured fifteen years, the one great marvel being how the poor wretched woman contrived to keep all their heads above water for such a long lapse of time. But she did so. Some little resources were left to her, and when she had once seen clearly into her husband's nature, she thought herself justified in concealing them from him. To these she added the produce of her own hard labour, and now and then persuaded Claude into accepting odd jobs, which by dint of entreaty, and the esteem people had for her industry, she obtained for him. But this was rare. Claude Raynal looked upon his wife as especially appointed by Providence to take care of him. She occupied the place Protection refused to fill in his early days, and upon her he persistently, ruthlessly, leant until the day when it pleased the Almighty to remove him from this earth. Luckily, about two years before the period at which our story opens, Claude Raynal died, and—his wife regretted him!

Yes! Claude had been weak, lazy, ungrateful, useless—he had deliberately drained to the very dregs every resource which his helpmate had to dispose of, and had never thanked her; he had made her entire existence one long succession of various and unceasing toil, whilst he indulged in all the debauchery he could practise without falling under the clutch of the law; he had come across the path of this poor, striving,

honest woman, and doomed her to incurable misery, and the only child that was left them—a girl—to total destitution. All this, and even more, had Claude Raynal done, but he had been the means of raising this woman's self-esteem to the highest point it could attain in so humble a sphere as hers, and she was tender of him for the superiority he gave her. People in this position know nothing of moral or mental processes, but dimly feel results. Claude's unenlightened, struggling wife had no consciousness of what was passing within her, but she strove and suffered for her wretched husband with a brave *maternal* tenderness; and when he lay dead before her—dead, at last, from drunkenness—she felt that the chief cause of her great worth, of her womanly worth, had departed, and she grieved.

Besides all this, too, the man's illness had cost money, for it had lasted long after repeated attacks of *delirium tremens* had enfeebled him; and his burial, which the widow resolved should be a decent one, cost something more, and her own strength, momentarily shattered, was insufficient for the increased work demanded of it, and so the widow Raynal had to sell the last of her small belongings, a cottage with its kitchen-garden, a source till now of gain.

When all was settled a small sum remained; it was very small, but it would vanish if not utilized. And accordingly the Widow Raynal decided upon purchasing the goodwill of the grocer's business belonging to the corner shop we have described in the village of St. Martin. To do this, she had to borrow five hundred

francs, her own meagre resources not sufficing, so she began her new business with her future profits already, to a certain degree, pledged. However, the old activity re-awoke, and, at the end of a year, the widow was straining through her hardships and had paid half her debt.

She had added to her grocery, and odds-and-ends trade (all things generally from woollen stuffs, writing-paper, and fireworks down to marbles) a manner of wine-shop, and in a side room there were two or three tables at which the wine of the country could be drunk, pipes smoked, and the *Siècle* read.

But one day, the progress of our age asserted itself, and the house with a balcony, and three stories, and a bright blue sign, rose up over the way, and the Hôtel de l'Europe overwhelmed the miserable drinking-shop opposite. The Hôtel de l'Europe opened a *café* where absinthe was to be had, and wherein a counter of shining zinc mirrored itself in a glass with a gold frame, and the days of the wine-shop were numbered.

The widow struggled still, for it was in her nature to do her utmost; but she struggled feebly, for, in the first place, the flesh was not equal to the will, and, in the next, she knew herself vanquished. The spirit of the time had beaten her, and she despaired without knowing why. She stared stupidly at the big house rising up before her, was ignorant of its connection with railways and progress, but bowed down before the grandeur of the zinc counter. That, she knew, she could not resist.

A month before our tale opens, the widow Raynal had died.

By the side of the woman, whose life had been one long sacrifice, stood a girl of seventeen, utterly unknowing what the immediate future of life would be to her.

Madeleine Raynal was familiar with hardship. From the time she could receive impression, the difficulty of living had impressed itself upon her. All the children born before her had died; she alone remained; healthy as far as mere health went, not active, and not possessed of any attraction—a tall, pale girl, with a muddy skin, on which the fair hair made no contrast, and what the other mothers of the place called an unpleasant look about the eyes. Her own mother loved her dearly.

Not at first, however, for, when she was born, trouble already sat at the hearth of the Raynals, and she wife's energies were absorbed in taking charge of her husband. He was really her child; and to her he deferred and submitted. With all his faults, he never, even when stupid with drink, had spoken to his wife an angry word; and, for this, she requited him; mourning inwardly for his loss—mourning too all the more that she did not dare let her grief appear. She would have been sneered at and blamed—this, she knew.

But when the grown-up infant was gone, the mother turned to the girl; and though there was no sentimentality between them—(there never is among such poor hard workers as these)—they clung to each other closely as human creatures do upon a raft after a shipwreck.

Life was a shipwreck to them, and a day lived through was a gain.

Madeleine was brought up as best she could be; sent to the *salle d'asile* from the age of two to that of seven, and to the communal school till she was fourteen. She could read, write, sew, and cast up accounts tolerably, but she was decreed to be a dull child, and so, indeed, she looked; and she was never anybody's pet or favourite. The sisters never petted her, nor M. le Curé either, nor any of the ladies in the châteaux roundabout; and Madeleine grew up an unnoticed, uninteresting girl.

The widow Raynal was beginning to think of what she could do with her daughter, when she died—died suddenly; inasmuch as long years of toil and a few months of despair had annihilated all power of resistance, when disease came in the form of bilious fever, she was at once struck down.

At her mother's death Madeleine learnt what it is to be destitute. She had only known privation hitherto, and though cold and hunger had approached her more than once, she did not know what it was to shiver and be without one log of wood or even warm ashes for the foot-pan, or to crave and be without one crust to still the craving. This it was which she learnt when the Widow Raynal died.

As the half-yearly rent for the shop had been overdue more than a month, the proprietor took his precedence of other creditors, and seized. As the poor wooden coffin, borne on one man's shoulder, was car-

ried out of the shop, the bailiff walked into it, and took possession of all it contained, except one bed.

When Madeleine came home from seeing her mother's remains put into the common grave of paupers, she found the men of law at their grim work; which was soon ended, there was so little to seize. The proprietor was not a bad man, and he said the girl might stay a few days. She tried to do so; and, for two days, continued to eat the small remains of food she could find. She thought that grief for her mother's loss possessed her; so it did till the animal wants came. But the cold (it was a sharp November) pinched her; and hunger gnawed at her, and the darkness and solitude frightened her, and, on the fourth day, she ran out, leaving the door open behind her, and, darting over the threshold of a neighbouring dwelling (the little sabot-maker's shop by the church across the road), she caught at the figure of a woman who was bending over a pot upon the fire, and, joining her hands, exclaimed, "Oh, Madame Perrot!" and burst into a fit of convulsive sobbing.

The sabot-maker's mother, a widow also, and also very poor, took the unfortunate girl to her heart, warmed her, fed her, soothed her; and, with a charity which rarely fails women of the poorer classes in France, prevented Madeleine Raynal from being crushed out of reason or life by the overwhelming sense of utter loneliness.

CHAPTER II.

The Appeal.

A MONTH went by, and the keen winds of the plains made the frosts of December more biting. Madeleine Raynal had been warmed and fed, and there was a low straw chair by the side of the fire in the sabot-maker's abode, where the girl might be seen, day after day, cowering over the carefully covered embers. She did nothing; but, her terror and her physical wants allayed, she seemed to accept naturally the fact of support given to her by another almost as poor as herself. All the dullness of her nature had returned to her, and the truest mode of describing her parasite existence would be to say that she hung about. Those who remembered Claude Raynal, shrugged their shoulders contemptuously, and opined that the father's lazy, dependent character was fast coming out in the girl. Poor Madame Perrot said nothing, uttered no reproach, went on dividing her humble cheer with her guest, and sought vainly to find some employment by which Madeleine might earn her livelihood. She found nothing.

But there was in the sabot-maker's dwelling some one who looked grudgingly on the portion of existence which was subtracted from the little household by Madeleine, and this was the sabot-maker himself. Denis

Perrot was ten years older than Madeleine; and had once or twice, as a boy, taken notice of her: nay, almost taken her part against others, and the consequence had been a kindlier feeling between these two than had perhaps existed between anyone else and the uninteresting child of the unlucky Raynals. But Denis had met with an accident to his hip, in the early autumn; an abscess had ensued, he had had to take to his bed, and, for the last three weeks, had been incapable of any work at all. Nothing in the domain of sentiment, no childish memories, had they been ever so strong, could endure against the animal selfishness of the sick workman. As he lay in his bed, in the small room on the ground-floor, which was kitchen, shop, bed-room, everything, you might see him casting glances of fierce envy at Madeleine, as she took from his mother a bowlful of the soup, into which it cost so dear to put even pork, let alone a bone of beef with any flesh upon it. The doctor had said that the invalid's strength must be kept up, and here was this stranger sapping this strength by her unconscientious appetite. She was devouring what was to be the marrow of his bones. He hated her: one day he told her so. They were alone; and the hard words and bitter reproaches that issued suddenly from the lair, on which she thought Denis was sleeping, stung Madeleine to the quick, and roused whatever was dormant in her sluggish nature. Perhaps some spark of her mother's energy lay under the ashes after all.

"You have no right to stay here," said, at last,

the sick man, in a querulous tone. "You are eating my mother's substance; you should go away."

"Go where?" retorted Madeleine.

"I'm sure I can't tell," was the reply; "but somewhere—anywhere. You ought to do something."

"Do what?" asked the girl.

"Well, I'll tell you what," and Denis raised himself on his elbow with a sudden inspiration; "go up to the château yonder. This very morning, the gardener, Jean Louis, was down here about his sabots, and told how the ladies have as good as lost their maid, who has got the typhus fever. They're going up to Paris next week; go and get 'em to take you as their maid. Go! that would be a rare fine thing."

The girl had risen to her feet, and was standing looking intently into the fire.

"A chambermaid?" she repeated, gloomily. "A servant?—a drudge!"

"Yes," growled the sabot-maker; "you'd rather beg than work: rather eat my food than work for your own!"

There was a suppressed savageness in his tone that overawed Madeleine.

"I will go and try, Denis," said she, submissively; and she put on her shawl and her sabots, and went her way to the château.

The Château de Clavreuil was about a mile off, in a straight line. You went down the road from Blois to Tours, crossing the road from Tours to Chartres, and, on the other side, at the end of a long, straight,

lime avenue, stood a massive building, in the style of Louis XIII., the habitation of the Comte René de Clavreuil, one of the four or five large landowners of the province, who lived there with his wife and only daughter during seven or eight months of the year.

It was past three when Madeleine set out on her errand; it would take her nearly an hour to get to Clavreuil, so she had to make haste, for the day was a lowering one, with dark clouds upon the horizon, and night falls early in December.

She walked quick, and reached the house before the clocks struck four. With some little trouble she obtained admittance to the Countess's presence, and began to recount the sad story of her life, and her mother's trials, before asking for anything definite; for it became apparent, even to her dull perceptions, that there was a terrible gulf between her own wretchedly clad person and the meanest domestic of this well-appointed household. She felt she must first interest her hearers; she tried to do so—and failed.

Madame de Clavreuil's reputation for charity stood firm and lofty in the neighbourhood of St. Martin. There was no school, no asylum, no refuge, no foundation of any kind, within twenty miles, that did not count her among its patronesses. She was active and large-handed, and still fair to look upon, and all good Christians blessed her.

In the room into which Madeleine Raynal was shown everything breathed comfort and peaceful happiness. There was warmth and the perfume of sweet

flowers, and pure women; and no goodlier sight could be well imagined than Madame de Clavreuil bending over her embroidery frame, on which glowed a magnificent priestly stole, and her young daughter Claire, who was reading aloud to her the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

When Madeleine entered, the Countess looked up from her embroidery, her daughter laid down her book upon the table. Both ladies looked at the unattractive, meanly-dressed girl, and she felt that all courage, and nearly all coherence of thought had departed from her. She told her story lamely.

"Why did M. le Curé never speak to me of your mother, my poor child?" inquired Madame de Clavreuil, with a gentleness of tone and look that ought to have encouraged the petitioner, but did not do so.

"We scarcely knew him," was the reply; "he never came to us."

"You should have gone to him," rejoined the lady.

"Mother had no time. It was all work at home. There were days when she was up at two o'clock in the morning, and there were nights when she never got to bed at all."

"And Sundays when you never went to church," interposed Madame de Clavreuil, not severely, but as though it pained her to say it.

The girl hung her head.

"Madame la Comtesse," murmured she, "let alone the work, mother had not always clothes in which she

could go to mass. She had been better off, and was ashamed."

Madame de Clavreuil shook her head.

"Ashamed!" she echoed, with a sigh—"ashamed to go to the house of God! I am afraid, Madeleine, that what has been said to me more than once was too true; that your poor mother relied too much upon herself, and not enough upon the only support that avails. It is a grievous fault; but we will hope it is forgiven her. She died, having received all the sacraments, did she not?"

"All," answered Madeleine; adding naïvely, "M. le Curé said all was quite in order; but I never saw him again since the funeral."

"You have lived since then at Mother Perrot's," observed the Countess; "M. le Curé could not go there. Denis Perrot is a noted scoffer, and his mother performs few or none of her religious duties."

"I was dying of want, and had not a crust to eat when Mother Perrot took me in," objected Madeleine; "if she had not given me food, I must have starved in the street."

A casual spectator who should have witnessed this interview between Madame de Clavreuil and Madeleine Raynal would have been inclined to suppose that the dauntless energy and self-reliance of the poor dead widow had left to her child an inheritance of distrust. She was evidently distrusted because her mother had committed the impiety of overtrust in herself. All this time Claire de Clavreuil never took her eyes from

Madeleine's face, but gazed at her with an intent and curious gaze.

After a short pause in the conversation:—

"What can I do to help you?" said the Countess, compassionately; "what was it you came to ask of me?"

Madeleine stared in amazement, for the original object of her visit had been driven momentarily out of her head, and the consciousness of her fearful needs brought it back to her with a shock. She blushed, and then turned pale, and, clasping her hands together,

"Oh, Madame la Comtesse," stammered she, "take me into your service."

Madame de Clavreuil put away her embroidery frame, and turned her chair half round, so as fully to front the suppliant.

"Take you into my service?" she said, kindly; "but, my poor girl, what can you do?"

At this question Madeleine revived as at the contact of a vague hope.

"What can I do?" she repeated, almost briskly; "I can read and write well, and do anything in the way of work. Oh! madame," she continued, emboldened, and coming nearer to the Countess, "take me as your maid in place of Mademoiselle Céleste, who is so ill."

The difficulty was surmounted, the worst was done; she had made the request, and now she would struggle hard to obtain it. Madame de Clavreuil's first impression had been evidently one of blank surprise, and

she instantly repressed it. It was succeeded by a look of pain and pity.

"The place of lady's maid in Paris (and we shall be there next week) requires experience, which you have not," observed she, gently; "it would be impossible for you to fulfil its duties."

At the word impossible, the whole sense of her destitute position rushed back upon Madeleine, and lent her an energy which was not in her every-day nature.

"Oh! madame," she cried, desperately, "try me. I can do more than you think, and I must starve if you do not take me."

Madame de Clavreuil made an imperceptible sign to her daughter, who left the room.

"Madeleine," said she, rising, and coming close to the petitioner, "your inexperience and incapacity are not the real reasons for my being unable to give you a situation in my house. The real reason is—" she hesitated—"the real reason is, that it would be giving a bad example."

The girl fixed her eyes upon her in speechless bewilderment.

"My poor child," continued Madame de Clavreuil, with real compassion, and taking the girl's hand in hers, "you and your unfortunate mother have never set a good example. I do not accuse you of unbelief—God forbid!—but you never showed any piety; you have not been well-noted in your classes, my poor Madeleine. I do not speak of laziness, doggedness,

hardness of disposition; those are human defects—but you have shown no love for our divine religion. You have set a bad example, Madeleine; it was remarked that you passed through your first communion with indifference, and for two years you have not been to confession. My poor girl, if I took you into my house I should be flying in the face of my duty, and doing an injustice. I have a daughter; my maid attends upon her. I could not allow——”

“Madame la Comtesse,” burst forth the girl, with sudden fire, “no one living can say any harm of me.”

“In a certain sense, none, Madeleine,” was the reply; “but I should be rewarding a manifest neglect of religious duties if I engaged you in my service. I have, moreover, already promised Céleste’s place to Justine Vaud.”

“To Justine Vaud!” ejaculated Madeleine—“to the daughter of the carpenter, who has been saving money all his life?”

“And who is a model of piety,” rejoined Madame de Clavreuil. “But, my dear child, I will come to your aid also, though in another way. Go home, be patient, offer up your sufferings to our Lord, go to the Sisters, go to M. le Curé; I will see them all to-morrow on your behalf, and be convinced that it is never too late to mend. Return to God with true fervour, and you may yet set a good example to those around you.”

Madeleine wept and knelt and implored, but all in vain, and when she left Madame de Clavreuil’s presence,

she did so without hating her, for she knew Madame de Clavreuil was sincere.

If no harm were done in the world save by the evil-minded seeking to do evil, we poor mortals should have less to complain of than we fancy; but our chiefest miseries spring from the mistakes of the common-minded seeking to do good. Madame de Clavreuil had the kindest heart in the world, which she was for ever striving to put down; she had a second-rate intellect, and had blindly accepted whatever had been taught her, clinging to whatever she deemed her duty with determination. It broke her heart to wound anyone, but she had had narrow precepts early instilled into her, and she followed them narrowly. When Madeleine had left her she simply sat down and wept for pity, and said to herself: "Oh! how hard it is to do right!" and the reason why Madeleine did not curse her in her heart was, that upon even her dull sense, it was borne in that the Countess suffered whilst doing what she believed her duty.

In a passage leading towards the door, which opened on the steps descending into the stable-yard, a tall, slight figure brushed by, a light touch was laid on Madeleine's arm, and a silvery voice said:—

"My poor, poor, girl—take this," and a small silver medal was put into her hand.

She looked up, and met the sweet, sympathising, pure glance of Claire de Clavreuil.

"I have nothing else," said Claire, "but promise

me to wear this always, and to pray fervently to the Blessed Virgin. She will help you."

The look was a dull, stupid one, with which Madeleine Raynal stared first at the medal and then at its giver, and before she could thank the latter she was gone.

When Madeleine reached the stable-yard it was raining. She put her old grey shawl over her head, and went towards the gate opening on the road.

As she passed before an open door, she perceived two young men standing at it. They were in riding costume, rather bespattered with mud, and were apparently but just arrived. Why she stood still, when she came close to them, she did not herself know.

"Who are you?" said one of the two; "where do you come from? Do you want anyone here?"

She came closer, and drew her shawl tighter over her head, "I am the Widow Raynal's daughter from St. Martin," she replied, "and I am starving."

"Starving!" echoed he who had already spoken, but not in a particularly kind tone; however, he put his hand into his pocket, and holding out a five-franc piece, "take that, then," he added, "though I confess I never exactly know what people mean when they talk of starving—nobody ever actually *starves*."

"Yes they do!" retorted Madeleine, and, as she came nearer, the light of the lamp over the stable-door fell upon her face.

She left the yard slowly, lingeringly, and before

she had done so, she overheard the following dialogue between the two young men.

"Good God! what a strange face," said one.

"Strangely ugly," said the other.

"Strangely, curiously beautiful!" replied the first.

"That's what comes of being a painter," observed his friend. "You painters see what you call beauty in what is positively hideous."

"I see beauty when it is only latent," was the rejoinder. "Look at the form of that girl's mouth and nose and brow; look at the line of the eyebrows; it reminds one of the Medusa; how I should like to study that head! You, Olivier, only see the muddy, insignificant colouring; but feed the girl well, and you would soon see how she'd come out. She's only hungry."

"Br-r-r!" responded he who had been called Olivier. "I have no taste whatever for a hungry heroine. I tell you it is only you artists who see beauty in your dreams, and distribute it to those who have no trace of it in themselves. Besides, how can a woman be otherwise than ugly unless she is dressed: a sloppy, ragged, draggled girl with a dirty shawl over her head is not a woman. Bah! my dear Henri, it may be hard and unchristian, and all that sort of thing, but the poor are always ugly."

CHAPTER III.

Out on the Road.

It was almost dark when Madeleine got back to the high road. She crossed it, and struck into the causeway leading straight to St. Martin before she distinctly perceived how hard it had been raining.

Like all such roads in France this said causeway between Tours and Blois was perfectly well kept; but still a heavy shower did disturb its exquisite propriety, and leave long lines of water in its ruts, however shallow these might be.

The night was coming on, wet and gusty, such as the nights so often are in early winter, in the milder provinces of France. A truly miserable night.

As yet it was but just beginning to unfold its mantle, for it was not much over five o'clock, but the foreshadowings of night were gloomy. Large masses of black clouds drifted across the sky like rent draperies of a funeral pall, whilst towards the horizon there lingered on pale streaks of dying day, that were indeed ghastly. The wind moaned and whistled, not having yet risen into fury, and swept sadly over the earth with that peculiar tone it takes when sweeping over bare plains, where there are no trees. The rain did not fall down straight from above, but seemed, as

if it were blown about by handfuls, and thrown at the passer-by, man or beast, fitfully. Ever and anon, out struggled a beam of the scarcely risen moon, like a mute appeal against the terrible clouds that were bent upon flinging their sables over its light.

A dismal evening truly, and a dismal form was that which toiled on upon the road; the form of that sloppy, draggle-tailed girl, with a dirty shawl over her head!

Yes! Madeleine was all that. Before she had striven half her way back she was wet through, and the wretched garments she had on clung to her limbs. Her shawl was dirty, old, torn in some places, patched in others, and as its unsightly folds fastened clammily upon her cheek and brow, they fixed the long tresses of hair, deranged by the wind, in her mouth, or in her eyes, and she was forced with one hand to dash them away, while with the other she must keep a tight hold upon her clothes, so as not to have them torn away by the gusts which were gradually increasing in strength. Her shoes were worn, and had holes in them, and the water got into them, and at each step, she heard her feet go *plash, plash*.

This outcast girl did not do what perhaps you or I might do, but what in her position no one ever does; she did not indulge in any abstract or philosophical reflections, or go from the known to the unknown, cursing society and the high-born or wealthy as the causes of her suffering. She simply felt the physical ills that assailed her, felt deadly cold, and miserably

wet and worn out from struggling against the wind, but she did not connect society or any established order of things with her misery. Like men in battle, who only realise what goes on immediately around themselves, Madeleine Raynal, in this her battle of life, saw no further than the individual beings near to her, who had wounded or were threatening her.

She did not hate Madame de Clavreuil perhaps, because, as I have said, she felt her truth; or, perhaps, because she had lost all memory of her refusal of aid in the sense of a deeper wound more recently dealt.

She hated the man she had heard called Olivier, and she shuddered with terror when she thought of Denis Perrot.

Madame de Clavreuil had told her to go home. But where was her home? She had none. She had the five-franc piece in her hand that had been given her in the stable-yard at the Château; but after that had fed her for three or four days, say a week, where should she go then? She did not dare think of going back to Mother Perrot's, or of again touching with her longing lips the food which was destined to restore strength and the power of earning his bread to Denis. She was afraid of the man; afraid he would murder her; and, in the midst of all her trouble, of her hunger, and cold, and utter desolation, she did not think of suicide, nor even of death. On the contrary, strange as it may seem, she thought of life, dimly, involuntarily, if you will, but her instincts, all, set lifewards, not deathwards.

She had heard all that had been said of her in the stable-yard, and the woman in her had been awakened as well as humbled to the dust. She was like a savage to whom, on a desert island, a genius should give the Koh-i-noor, with the knowledge of its worth. Her possession of a treasure had been revealed to her; but what to do with it? She hated the man who had said she was ugly; but the man who had said she might be beautiful had troubled her far more. He who pronounced her ugly did not provoke her rancour, *because* he called her so, for she did not believe him (she believed the other, who said she could achieve beauty)—she hated him because he denied to her the means whereby the beauty could be achieved. He doomed her to ugliness from her needs, and therein he spoke Truth, and the truth only has power to impress profoundly. He had said that a sloppy, draggled-tailed girl, with a dirty shawl round her head, was not a woman, and she felt that to be true, and that she was that girl. The other had said she was only hungry; it was true, she was hungry. He had said her beauty would be apparent if she were properly fed! who was there to feed her?

I say again, we none of us rebel against Truth. We deny it to be the truth. But Madeleine could not deny. The belief she accorded to the man who had affirmed her capacity of beauty was a matter of Faith and Instinct, for she had hardly ever seen her own face in a glass, and her mind had never been turned towards the notion of her own outward semblance.

Her life had been too hard and too unsociable for that. But the truth she recognised as palpable was, the cold, the hunger, the misery, the poverty, that denied to her the possibility of ever being otherwise than unsightly.

"The poor are always ugly."

Madeleine thought that sounded like a death-knell, but she felt it sounded true; she hated him who had thus passed sentence upon her, and she recognised that she was utterly helpless and hopeless.

As she crossed the bridge she heard a dull beating noise, and saw, by the light of a lantern on the edge of the pond, a solitary woman finishing her washing. Another hard worker, completing her task out in this dreary evening! well! if the work gave her wherewith to live, she was happy; but Madeleine, who had no work? what was to become of her?

That was the question she asked herself as she sank down upon the stone steps of the corner shop where she had lived with her mother, and let her wet, weary head lean back upon the closed door.

"What will become of me?"

The reader knows the situation of the shop, bearing still the inscription of the Widow Raynal's tenancy and trade upon its front; but a few words are yet required to describe certain details of the near neighbourhood. Opening in front to the road, the shop, as has been already stated, had its windows round the corner, upon a muddy lane. This lane was bordered to the right by a few very poor cottages, whilst on the left the hedge, by which it was bounded, enclosed the

outlying portions of the property of the Baron de Sauveterre. The estate was a goodly one; and well kept, and skirting the entire village of St. Martin to the back, spread out to a considerable distance in the direction of Blois. St. Martin had in reality but three neighbours; the family of Clavreuil, right in front, the Marquise de Beauvoisin and her son Olivier, about two miles to the west; and behind—Sauveterre.

The owner and inhabitant of this last-named château, was a very rich, very selfish, very dissolute old man. His hospitality was splendid, his cook a genius, his stable admirably mounted, and the pleasures his welcome offered were accepted on all hands without respect or esteem being ever given in requital by his guests, or claimed by him. A few days ago, it was said that the noisy visitors who had filled the house for several weeks had all departed, and the baron himself was supposed to have left Sauveterre for Paris.

Just as Madeleine Raynal laid her head back against the shop-door, and avoiding to look over the way at the light in Mother Perrot's window, behind which might be glowering the sick sabot-maker in angry mood, saw only the dense darkness of the terrible future; just as the utter helplessness of her position seemed to be literally crushing her, the hoarse tones of the wheezy old church clock struck six, and one second after might be heard in the distance the ringing of a bell.

Madeleine listened, raised her head, and seemed to be recalled to action by some sudden inspiration or hope.

The bell rang on. It was the bell at the Château de Sauveterre. Six o'clock. It was the dressing bell; dinner was invariably served at half-past six. But if dinner was thus heralded in, the master of the house was still there. Twenty minutes' stout walking would bring anyone from St. Martin to the back entrance, and among the domestics the Widow Raynal had counted friends.

Madeleine rose to her feet, shivering to her very bones with cold, stiff with wet.

"If I were to try the Baron?" murmured a voice within her.

About an hour and a half later, when the Widow Raynal's daughter stood, shrinking and shuddering in the vestibule of the Château de Sauveterre, her old, grey shawl thrown back from her head, her hair brushed back from her temples, and the fever hue of want, excitement, and dread mantling her cheek and kindling her eye, a sudden blaze of light nearly blinded her. A door opened wide, and from the dining-room streamed forth the radiance of lamps, and steamed forth the rich odours of viands and wines. The meal was ended, voices were heard in pleasant talk, and on the threshold of the door, the hungry girl had a vision of two old men, pausing for a moment in their converse ere they crossed the hall. They seemed to her enframed, as it were, in splendour, as their two figures stood out upon the background of gorgeousness and comfort that was supplied by the illuminated dining-chamber.

CHAPTER IV.

Alone in the World.

It would be difficult to find throughout France a family more respected than the Clavreuil. They were equally respected in the Province and in Paris. There must really have been nothing to say of them, for no one said anything. As far as birth went they were probably irreproachable; for the public voice never declared that one of their recent forefathers had been a lacquey, or a hackney-coachman. Their wealth, too, must have been honestly got, for no envious associate ever asserted that they had stolen it, offering to give proofs of his assertions; and the conduct of both husband and wife was apparently excellent, for no friend, however intimate, or of either sex, ventured to hint that what he or she knew was sufficient to cause every door to be closed in the face of the pair. In the absence of all assertion, hint, or surmise to the contrary, it grew to be an established fact that nothing could be more thoroughly, absolutely respectable than M. and Madame de Clavreuil.

This is a thing sufficiently uncommon in France to be noteworthy.

The Comte René de Clavreuil was of an ancient and distinguished, if not exactly illustrious, family;

which may be almost exclusively held to imply that his ancestors had formerly fought in the service of the king by sea and land. M. de Clavreuil had no fortune whatever; so that his sister (they were alone, himself and Mademoiselle Clémentine) had been altogether without a dowry, and he had married a great heiress, Mademoiselle de Lancour, of equally good birth with himself.

Ten or twelve years after this marriage, and when the sole child born of it was about eight or nine years of age, it occurred to a bachelor cousin of M. de Clavreuil's who, by the thousand chances attendant upon the subdivision of landed property in France, had become possessed of the family estate, to leave these paternal acres to the man who had achieved wealth sufficient to do them honour. At the death, therefore, of his cousin, René de Clavreuil was raised even more in his own esteem than in that of others; for he was possessed of territorial fortune in his own right, and became his wife's equal, which is always a pleasant feeling for a gentleman—and Count René de Clavreuil was a gentleman. He was decidedly not brilliant, or in any way clever; never had said a good thing in all his life, and was slow at appreciating those said by others; but he was not deficient in judgment or sense; was upright, just, and what people who dread superiority of every kind delight in denominating right-minded. M. de Clavreuil's was one of those negative, non-conducting natures, that may become the centre of the most portentous events without ever foreseeing

them, or ever fathoming their meaning even after they have taken place.

Madame de Clavreuil, Count René's wife, was, as we have said, a woman whom all good Christians blessed. Her chief misfortune in life was the having had for a father the brilliantly gifted, notorious, and anything but orthodox Vicomte de Lancour. It was not that against the purity of M. de Lancour's honour any breath had been ever breathed, or that any human creature lived who could say he had ever done an actual wrong. No; but his life had been one of laxity with regard to religious forms and ceremonies. Thought to be of immense promise in the last years of Louis XVIII., the young Vicomte was, with one accord, thrown into the shade during the disastrous reign of Charles X. The natural consequence was, that he played a political part under Louis Philippe, and shone forth lustrously in the firmament of the monarchy of July. His wife belonged to the purest Faubourg St. Germain, and refused ever to be presented at the usurper's court. His daughter was brought up to believe that to pray for her misguided father was the limit to which tolerance could be allowed to stretch; and when, shortly after the Revolution of February, Re-action, as it is termed, deliberately set in, Marie de Lancour, then Comtesse de Clavreuil, grew accustomed to hear her father spoken of by those she daily lived with, as a man whose example was so lamentable that his name should not be mentioned unguardedly before young people. Herein lay, then,

the misfortune of Madame de Clavreuil's life: she was brought up in fear and trembling, and the narrowest prejudice and most senseless resistance to all natural feelings and tendencies were imposed upon her authoritatively as a duty. Yes, a duty; for of what derelictions and weaknesses, of what sins, nay even crimes, might not the daughter and the grandchild of the too-famous M. de Lancour be naturally guilty? So that Madame de Clavreuil, whom nature had made a thorough woman—fond, kind, indulgent, sweet and fair in soul as in face—had been, by the manner of her education, transformed into a species of terrified sentinel, her whole nature compelled into inferiority by drill, determined to die at her post, but for ever on the watch for the cry of *qui vive* which was to call her into the fulness of her repressive activity.

Between this thoroughly well-intentioned pair—the father so upright, the mother so resolved at all costs to do her duty—was brought up Claire de Clavreuil, an only child, a wealthy heiress,—a prize to be competed for by all comers, and, oftener than one likes to register, won and worn by the unworthy.

Poor Claire! two months had just passed since we last saw her seated by her mother's side in the drawing-room at Clavreuil, reading the *Life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary*, and the plan of her life's drama was laid out. Things were settled: Claire was to be married, after Lent, to the Marquis de Beauvoisin, a young man of great name and exceeding great fortune—the Olivier

who has been mentioned in a previous chapter as encountered by Madeleine, whom he pronounced ugly.

Was this, then, what is styled a marriage of convenience? a marriage in which the fitness of two fortunes, two social positions, two estates, in short, is solely taken into consideration? No! you will be gravely told in France that such marriages no longer exist. Neither do they under the repulsive tyrannical form they used, some seventy or eighty years ago, to assume.

There is no shutting up in convents, now-a-days, of recalcitrant girls; no violence, no arbitrary rule, no cruelty, against which to appeal to God and man; but the end reached is pretty much the same. Men and women are bound together who neither love, nor know, nor care to know, each other. They are placed between *ennui* (if not misery) and wrong, and condemned to be obscurely heroic. This is the reason why those who in France do their duty are mostly so joyless. Virtue among French people wears always a severe aspect, and they who practise it (an immense mass), are never cheerful.

Well, the friends of Claire de Clavreuil would tell you she had chosen her future lord; it was quite true that before the Marquise de Beauvoisin's proposals, on her son's part, had been assented to, Claire was consulted, as they were pleased to term it, by her parents. But, had the girl thus consulted been so educated as to make the consultation aught save a mockery? Had not Claire been taught, since her early childhood, that

to love was a sin, and that, after obedience to God, blind obedience to all superiors—parents, of course, standing foremost—was the one saving virtue. How was it to enter into this gentle-natured, well-trained young girl's brain that she could possibly venture to have a personal and independent opinion about the man presented to her by her parents? When they said: "See what a mate for you we have chosen!" adding for form's sake, "Will you accept him?" where in the name of logic and common sense was she to find the courage wherewith to say No? When the momentous question was put to her, Claire said Yes, as it was natural she should do.

Visit succeeded visit at the Hôtel de Beauvoisin and at the Hôtel de Clavreuil, and the two mothers were esteemed happy among women, and much homage was done at their respective shrines, for, socially, much was expected of them. Besides, they were held to have set a good example, and they were successful.

"Are you really to have that wonderful set of diamonds and rubies, Claire?" asked of Mlle. Clavreuil, a young girl who had come with her mother to felicitate. She happened to be the only unmarried woman in the room, which was full of busy-looking, inquisitive matrons, so she monopolised Claire. "Are you really going to have them?" she repeated in a whisper.

"You must ask mamma," replied Mlle. de Clavreuil, with a smile, and an imperceptible shake of the head. "I know but little of these arrangements; I leave all to her."

"Leave all to her, my dear Claire!" retorted the other; "leave all to her! Yes, of course one leaves all to one's mother as long as one is only a girl; but, Heaven be praised! one does not leave her one's diamonds when one is married! Why, all Paris is talking of them! They say the necklace alone, with the three rows of brilliants, is worth 400,000 francs!"

"Indeed!" answered Claire, with the same smile as before.

"Now, do not put on that air of indifference!" urged her friend, impatiently, "or I shall believe you to be a hypocrite. No woman can possibly be indifferent to such jewels; and if you let them slip, it will only be said that my cousin Olivier thought the price too high!" (Claire winced.) "Don't allow that to be hinted at, above all things! Let your mother manage anything else you choose, but take care of the diamonds yourself; that is far too important a matter! They say, you know, that Olivier is in love with you; so seize your opportunity—tell him you want the diamonds; you'll get them now, my dear, and you won't get them later."

Claire winced again, and blushed scarlet, and her wise young friend would have added much more excellent advice, had she not been summoned from the other end of the room by her mother. She did not, however, depart, before she had, in her loquacity, found means of confiding to Claire that she had discovered, through her mother's maid, that a marriage was being negotiated for herself.

"They think I know nothing," she found time to say, "but I know all that goes on; the only difficulty is about 150,000 francs more to my dowry, which papa doesn't want to give down; but," she added, with profound sagacity, "that will be settled, because papa will not lose such a name and position for the sake of 150,000 francs; and, on the other hand, there are deficiencies, too: age, health, &c.: so that I have no fear at all; it is quite sure to be settled!" and, with that pleasant assurance, and the injunction not to utter a word, she embarked Claire, and skipped off.

Claire stood musingly at a table, turning over the leaves of a book, whose pages, it was evident, said nothing to her.

One lively old lady alone remained, and, from under the lace *ruches* of the bonnet and the dainty curls of her powdered grey hair, you heard here and there words escape which showed how deep an interest she took in the welfare of the young bride.

"Well," she murmured, as she took leave of Madame de Clavreuil, "I am glad to think there is so much inclination in the case. They are both so handsome, so young, it would seem a pity if there were not just a little bit of love between them." And the old lady (such a pleasant, pretty old lady as she was) went her way.

The mother and daughter were alone. Before resuming her habitual seat by the fire, Madame de Clavreuil went up to the young girl, who was still

standing at the table, with a vacant gaze fixed upon an open book.

"My darling!" said a soft voice, and a soft maternal kiss was imprinted on the glowing cheek of Claire.

"Mother," replied the latter, eagerly, "I wish I might speak to you openly,—quite openly."

Madame de Clavreuil fondly stroked the thick tresses of her child's fair hair.

"Do so, my sweet one," she rejoined; and the two sat down before the fire; the girl looking with an intentness at the mother, that the mother did not at first notice.

"Marriage is a solemn, a holy thing, mother," began Claire, with a sort of timid hurry. "Is it not?"

The Countess bowed her assent, and laid her hand on the hand of the girl so tenderly, that she seemed to invite her utmost confidence.

"Mother," added Claire, "does one marry to have diamonds und rubies, and to hear of nothing, save barter and traffic, when one is on the eve of such a change? Is it right that these should be the thoughts of a Christian woman?"

"My treasure," said Madame de Clavreuil, with increasing fondness, "you must not lay too much stress on these details. I trace the influence of Elise de Freteval in all this; but Elise has been brought up to think too constantly of her establishment in life. She is no guide for you—"

"Oh, mother!" interrupted Claire, with sudden

energy; "if I am to marry, let me forego these rubies and diamonds: let some good be done with the money."

"My own dear precious child," exclaimed the mother, drawing her daughter's head towards her, and warmly kissing her, while tears gathered in her eyes.

But Madame de Clavreuil had not heard the first words: "If I am to marry," and Claire inferred from her tenderness more than was meant.

"We can talk it over with the Abbé Gendrin," continued the Countess, "and perhaps some portion of the sum may go to found some institution. With the wealth you will have to dispose of, so much good can be done."

Claire was silent. She had, evidently, more to say, but was troubled how to say it. Never had she seen her mother so fond, so encouraging.

After a pause—

"Does it seem to you quite right," she recommenced, "that this great step should be taken, this long, life-engagement contracted so,"—she hesitated—"so lightly?"

"Lightly! Claire!" echoed Madame de Clavreuil, with undisguised astonishment. "Lightly! What do you mean?"

"I mean, mother," answered the girl, in a lower tone, "without any affection on either side."

"Affection comes later," observed the Countess.

"But if it never comes?" suggested Claire.

"Dearest," responded the mother, less warmly,

though still kindly, "these are questions which it does not befit a young girl to discuss."

"But if the girl's happiness be destroyed?" urged Claire; "if her heart be broken? if—"

"Claire!" exclaimed Madame de Clavreuil, hardly believing what she heard. "Claire!"

But the girl was now clearly carried beyond her usual timid reserve by a purpose. She pressed forwards, seized both her mother's hands, and, with every sign of uncontrollable agitation—

"Mother!" she pleaded; "let me once speak to you from my heart—once, before all is over, and irretrievable. Mother! must I marry M. de Beauvoisin?"

Madame de Clavreuil sprang from her seat, and stared with amazement at the child she seemed to know no longer. Had the voice woke no echo in her own heart? Was she struggling, or was she only frightened?

At first, her surprise found no utterance. She stood mute before the sudden revelation of things she had never guessed. Perhaps Claire argued favourably of this silence, for, pressing forward with growing energy, brow and cheek burning, eyes flashing, and quivering lips—

"Oh, mother, mother!" she cried; "do not put me from you! Think that I am your own, only child; think how young I am, and how hard it is to forego all happiness. Help me, mother! Listen, and let me tell—"

Madame de Clavreuil started back, and, holding her daughter, at arm's-length—

“What is all this absurdity?” she demanded, sternly. “Are you raving? What is this folly? Probably the result of those abominable English novels, which Mrs. Griffiths ought never to have permitted you to read. Let me never hear again words of this kind. Happiness, indeed! Happiness consists in doing your duty; and the one duty of a girl is obedience to her parents.”

In speaking as she did, Madame de Clavreuil was simply following the teaching she had received. Her heart would have prompted her to listen, but she dared not.

Claire felt her case was hopeless. She released her hold upon her mother's hand. The flush subsided upon her face, the lips closed, and she gazed at her mother more in wonder than in reproach. For a moment she seemed trying to fathom the cause wherefore she was thus repulsed. And then the gaze was lowered, the sweet head drooped upon the breast, and Claire glided noiselessly from her mother's presence.

Madame de Clavreuil fled to her own room, locked the door, cast herself upon the Prie-Dieu, burst into an agony of sobs and tears, and, clasping her hands, murmured bitterly—

“Oh, Father in Heaven! when will my weak nature find it easy to do what is right?”

Meanwhile, she was doing what was wrong.

CHAPTER V.

A Real Woman.

It has been mentioned that M. de Clavreuil had a sister. Her history was one not wholly without a parallel, but not common in France.

Clémentine de Clavreuil had no dowry. She was beautiful; but the consciousness of her superiority of birth and inferiority of fortune had given to her beauty a certain austere air, and to her whole bearing an excess of dignity, which is often, among French women, the consequence of a position such as hers.

At seven-and-twenty she was still unmarried, as was also her brother, who was her elder by two or three years. Clémentine came to the persuasion that she hindered her brother's establishment, and that she was regarded as a drag upon him. She accepted the hand of a strange husband for a girl so nobly born. She married a certain M. Beaudouin, a ship-owner of Bordeaux, thirty years older than herself, very ugly and mean-looking, enormously rich, and the best hearted and most honest of men.

Madame Beaudouin esteemed, honoured, revered, her humbly born partner in life, and when he spoke of her, which was rare, for the subject seemed too holy to be commonly handled, his vulgar face was illumined by an internal light that ennobled it.

Poor M. Beaudouin! his was really an ignoble semblance. He was short, and he shuffled along as he walked. His features were ungainly, his complexion of a fierce red, and his hair, which stood bolt upright, and which no brush could flatten, was so snowy, that, at a little distance, all you discerned of this man was a patch of white and a patch of scarlet. It was ugliness unqualified, aggressive.

But the soul within was a gentle one, and that his wife thoroughly knew, or she would never have married him. He lived five years, during which he was wont to say solemnly, he had known Paradise upon this earth. He died, leaving everything he possessed to his widow, with power to leave it at her death to whomsoever she chose. He had no relations nearer than cousins three or four times removed, whom he scarcely knew, and who were all rich.

Madame Beaudouin was, therefore, at thirty-two, one of the most enviable prizes in Paris. Rich to a quite unusual degree (people talked of two or three hundred thousand francs a year), and beautiful exceedingly. But Madame Beaudouin was not to be wooed, for it was rumoured that Madame Beaudouin was won.

What was believed at M. Beaudouin's death was this:—

Among the very large circle of guests to whom the hospitality of M. and Madame Beaudouin was always freely extended, one was especially remarked. Raymond de Varades was a captain upon Lamoricière's

staff, an African, a young man whose exploits were in every mouth, and whose fame filled all Algerian bulletins. But the purity of his character was as famous as his courage, and all men held up Raymond as an example.

His admiration for Madame Beaudouin was undisguised. Why should he descend to hide such sweet pure worship? It could but honour him and her. But a day came when the fair, serenely still countenance of Clémentine beamed with such a divine brightness, that the merest looker-on felt her to be transfigured. That day Raymond de Varades returned to Algeria, although he had still two months more leave at his disposal. The glorious light burned on, and waned not, upon Clémentine's lovely face—the light as of a sun that, once risen, would never set. She walked amongst men, wrapt as it were in a serene ecstasy, and her purity as much as her loveliness compelled their homage.

There were no petty subterfuges, no mean concealments, the love shone forth in all its grandeur, shielded only by the glory of its own innocence. No envious breath ever dimmed the fair fame of these severed lovers, but they lived on unsullied in the world, which against a really sublime Truth never rebels.

For two entire years M. de Varades never returned to Europe, and then M. Beaudouin died. It was rumoured that on his death-bed he had told his wife

how he had watched her loyal guardianship of his honour, and how his last moments would be rendered happier if he felt sure of her marrying M. de Varades.

However this might be, Raymond did return to Paris a couple of months after M. Beaudouin's death, and remained there a few weeks, during which time he was a constant visitor at the Clavreuil. Madame Beaudouin then decided that the proper mark of respect due to her deceased husband was, that M. de Varades should return to his post, and only revisit Paris when the full term of her mourning should have expired. Her slightest wish was to him a law, and he did return to Algeria. When the second year should be complete, he was to take a *congé* of a year; and when the third year after M. Beaudouin's death had expired, Clémentine was to become Madame de Varades. What was time, what was distance to them? she argued, in the strength of her purity, and of her love! Sure of her heart's Infinite, she counted on the Infinite in time; and losing sight of the lesser chances of existence, walked on recklessly in her passionate faith.

The same god-like ardour seemed to inspire Raymond; for during eighteen months the record of his deeds of impossible daring filled all newspapers. And then there was a silence of some days, and a small telegram appeared in the *Moniteur*, dated Blidah, in which it was stated that the Commandant de Varades had been killed by a fall from his horse. It was very short—only two lines; but it was enough, as had been the pebble over which, in the implacable irony of fate,

Raymond's horse had stumbled, on the steep path descending into a mountain defile.

M. de Varades was absorbed in the inward contemplation of his future happiness, when he was hurled several feet in advance over his faithful Arabian's head, and he had passed into eternity before awakening from his dream. He neither spoke nor breathed more.

All was over.

There is a mystery which the world never fathoms in all feelings which the world esteems excessive, that is, which go beyond its ken. Madame Beaudouin did not seem to suffer in the particular way in which the common run of men and women suffer. For some time after Raymond's death, she lived absolutely alone, seeing no living creature, neither brother nor sister-in-law, nor any of those who were her nearest in affection or blood. And then, when people saw her again, there was no perceptible change in her, they thought. She was, perhaps, a shade paler, and more silent than before, and subject to fits of abstraction, during which a faint reflection of the divine light which had once illumined her, and was now extinguished, seemed again to pass over her features.

The vulgar, who believe in one set form of mourning, never guess at the holy illusions of insupportable grief; never understand that excess of love—and pure love—admits of no separation, and really does vanquish death. Where love rises so high, and where the oneness it creates is so absolute, what do you know of

its secrets or of its consolations? Look on yon widow, and try to penetrate the cause of her long and placid endurance of life—of the ordinary life of those around her. The cause lies therein, that there has been no severance of the two Infinities: Love has been the victor over Death: the beloved one may be dead—yes; but gone from her—no.

And thus Clémentine lived on, and no one ever grew to be nearer to her. Probably hers was that solitude where one is least alone; it is certain that, although she mixed with her kindred, she never more partook of their life, or divided hers with them. Fourteen years passed over and brought no change. A seal seemed set on Madame Beaudouin's whole being, which forbade any other impress being made; she was, to all appearance, what she ever had been, and nor time nor emotion seemed to touch her.

This premised, Madame Beaudouin's activity had apparently but one mainspring—benevolence, the charity which ministers to all needs, and supplies the moral as the material wants. All suffering turned to her, and was allayed. And yet few out of those whom she helped and consoled felt thoroughly at home with her. She was, as it were, something angelic, not familiar.

"Is that woman, after all, thoroughly insensible?" asked once a young member of the Jockey Club of his neighbour; "impervious to all impressions? without any nervous system at all?"

The man he asked it of was the notorious Marquis

de Moranges, the last Mousquetaire, the hardest liver going, the man of whom, when he was under thirty, old Talleyrand, a week before his death, had said,—

“C'est un grand viveur que M. de Moranges.”

This man turned round, and, surveying his youthful neighbour, half in pity, half in scorn—

“Don't trouble yourself about Madame Beaudouin,” observed he; adding, with involuntary warmth, “if a real, true woman ever existed, there she is. But bah! mon cher, with that you have nothing to do—nor I either.”

CHAPTER VI.

Out in the Sun.

CLAIRE was her aunt's god-daughter, and tenderly attached to each other were aunt and niece. Perhaps Madame de Clavreuil might have feared the memory of her sister-in-law's romantic past, had it not been, first, that Clémentine's outward manner of taking that past had been decided by the world to be utterly unromantic; and, secondly, that worldly prudence forbade any apprehensions directed towards a relative who had an enormous fortune to leave.

Some persons affirmed that this was the only sign of calculation ever shown by Madame Beaudouin, and said that, in order to ensure to herself the frequent companionship of her niece, she was in the habit of keeping perpetually before her brother's eyes the power she had of leaving her fortune as she listed.

It was no wonder that Madame Beaudouin loved her niece, for a lovelier specimen of womankind than Claire has rarely graced our earth. Two circumstances had rescued Mlle. de Clavreuil from the narrowing influences of her education. One was the unceasing contact of Aunt Clémentine; and the other, the admirable good sense and kindness of her governess, Mrs. Griffiths. This lady was an English gentlewoman of reduced

means; thoroughly English, and thoroughly a gentlewoman; true, honest, of unswerving devotion to the Right, but gentle, meek, and tender, and who, though a Protestant, and used to social habits so different, had found means to bring up this Catholic French girl so irreproachably, and to do her own duty by her pupil, and her employers, so perfectly, that, whilst Claire rewarded her with a love sincere and deep, the whole Clavreuil family regarded her with unlimited respect.

Mrs. Griffiths had formed Claire's mind and edified her character on large and solid bases, and Mlle. de Clavreuil was not only, at eighteen, an accomplished, highly educated girl, she was a straightforward, noble, duty-loving lady, who knew Truth's value, and was, what those of her sex too rarely are, safe.

But what had made Claire a woman was the contact of her aunt, and the intense curiosity her aunt's history inspired in her. How she knew anything at all about it was a marvel, for her mother naturally, even in her own thoughts, never referred to it; Mrs. Griffiths was too conscientious to hint at a subject that her pupil's parents wished unspoken of; and Claire had never, in her whole life, been ten minutes alone with her own or the Countess's maid. Yet still she knew, and knew correctly, the whole outline of the tale, had pondered over it constantly, and eagerly longed to know its intimate details.

When Madame de Clavreuil, in obedience to what she deemed her duty, had so peremptorily stopped all

approach to a compromising confidence on her daughter's part, Claire instantly made up her mind to appeal to Madame Beaudouin.

Breakfast was no sooner over the next morning, than Claire sallied forth with Mrs. Griffiths, and was left by the latter at the door of her aunt's boudoir. These visits to Aunt Clémentine were of such frequent occurrence, that no note was taken of them, and it was usual for the governess to leave her pupil with Madame Beaudouin, while she herself thus obtained the freedom of her own movements for a couple of hours or so.

Aunt Clémentine was seated at a low table writing, when her niece entered the room.

Everything in that room bore witness to the refined tastes of its inhabitant. There was not one atom of gilding in it, except what lay upon the frames of choice pictures; nor a single spot of gaudy colouring, incapacitating the eye for seizing the soft harmonies of the whole. The walls were of carved wood, white, or pale grey, upon a grey of a deeper shade, disposed in panels; the style was that of Louis XVI., but the genuine Louis XVI. of 1780, not what is palmed off upon the ignorant under that name. The draperies and hangings were of old Beauvais tapestry, bordered by broad bands of that deep brown-red called garnet-coloured in France. Wherever the eye rested, there was something beautiful or rare to look upon:—China, bronzes, enamels, marqueterie tables, vases, flowers—but all in their proper place—not one there where the

other ought to have been. All was fitting, nothing stiff; all told of homeliness and every-day life, without a trace of untidiness.

And how fair was she still who presided over the place. At forty-seven you would have given her fifteen or twenty years less than her age. She had the fine outlines of the Clavreuil face, famed for its classic beauty; but the lustre of the eye, the light of the smile, the transparency of the delicate, smooth complexion, seemed to come from some mysterious source, and savoured as it were of immortality. Her dress, of a very pale fawn-coloured poplin, was at once severe and picturesque, the upper part fitting with exquisite precision, the lower flowing into rich swelling draperies, as in a Venetian picture. Over the glossy waves of her chestnut hair lay a *fauchon* of old point-lace, meeting under the chin, and encircling the sweet face of the wearer with a most graceful setting.

It calmed you, in spite of yourself, to look upon Aunt Clémentine, and the serenity of her whole being seemed as though it might calm almost any inward storm.

But ere she had released her niece from the embrace in which she, on her entrance, enfolded her, Madame Beaudouin saw that all was not right with Claire.

She resumed her own seat quietly, looking with tender earnestness at her niece, who at first bent down to caress a greyhound who was sleeping before the fire, and then drew a low stool upon the hearth-rug, and

seated herself at Madame Beaudouin's feet. The latter stooped towards her niece, and untied her bonnet and put it away upon a chair.

"You are not likely to have visitors, aunt, are you?" asked Mlle. de Clavreuil.

"I never receive any one, as you know, till after four," was the reply.

"I have so much to say," added Claire, hurriedly.

Madame Beaudouin put her arms round the girl's neck, and kissed her forehead.

"Aunt," resumed Claire, in a low and almost whispering tone; "you must promise to listen to every word I have to say."

"My darling," replied Madame Beaudouin, fondly; "you know that the thought of you and your welfare is what chiefly attaches me to life; but you know, also, what my principles are as to any interference between parents and children——"

"Aunt!" interrupted Claire, raising her sweet head and looking Madame Beaudouin fixedly in the face. "I know all you are going to say, and I know all you have been to me always; we have both of us done our duty—you have never interfered, and I have never rebelled; but now a moment is come when you must interfere." Madame Beaudouin's air was a very grave one, but she remained silent.

"Yes, aunt," added Claire; "I have come to you, in order that you may repeat to my father what I am going to say to you. I am not asking connivance from you, aunt, I am asking help; but help openly given,

I see what you would object; you think my mother ought first to have been applied to, aunt dear. I have tried that, and it failed. My mother either does not, or will not understand."

Madame Beaudouin sighed, and looked away into the flame-pictures of the fire. Claire put out her two hands, took her aunt's in hers, and earnestly gazing at her, "Do you think," she asked, "that what my father and mother are doing with me is right, or honest, or Christian? It does not make it better to tell me that every other girl is treated in the same way. So much the worse. If I am to marry M. de Beauvoisin, feeling towards him as I do, I should have been differently brought up. In that case you have done me harm, and Mrs. Griffiths has done me harm, for you have both of you taught me to be true, to be upright, to be honest; but if I am to be all that, I cannot marry M. de Beauvoisin."

"My Claire," interposed her aunt, "you should, at all events, have been at once frank with your parents. This marriage has been negotiated," (Madame Beaudouin hesitated slightly as she pronounced this word) "talked of for at least three months, and it is only now, when all is settled, that you object. Your parents would have a right to say you have deceived them."

"To that accusation I can only answer that I did not know the man," rejoined Mlle. de Clavreuil. "I did not rebel at the first notion of marriage, because it seems to be the common fate; but since I have known M. de Beauvoisin, I feel I ought not to marry him. I

am acting dishonestly if I do not say to him that I neither like nor esteem him; and if I marry him after I have said that, what will our union be?"

"What is your great objection to Olivier?" demanded, gently, Madame de Beaudouin.

"Everything," retorted her niece decisively. "He has neither intelligence nor heart; the only things he honours I despise; what I (and you) reverence is to him a dead letter; and the superiority which people press upon me as conclusive, makes me blush with shame, for it is only the superiority of his fortune. Does it satisfy you, Aunt Clémentine, that I should be sold?"

Madame Beaudouin evaded the glance that accompanied these words.

"Claire," said she, "that view is a wrong one, for you are very rich; and, with the addition of my fortune one day, you will be nearly as rich as Olivier."

The girl looked scrutinizingly at her aunt, almost doubtingly.

"You must not desert me," she continued, with singular energy. "You know your hold on my father. You must come to my aid, and prevent this marriage." And lowering her voice, and fathoming the very depth of her aunt's soul with her eyes, "You dare not refuse me," she murmured.

There was no perceptible change in Madame Beaudouin's fair and tranquil face; but, putting her hand on Claire's mouth,—

"Hush," said she, as she felt what a memory was

stirred; and then, after a pause of a few seconds, "My child," she continued, "the love of one human being for another is the holiest thing on earth. The mere absence of love is only a negation. In our time, and in our world, there is so little deep or true feeling, that perhaps it is scarcely justifiable to renounce a marriage because you fancy you do not *yet* like the husband proposed. In your case, darling, it is merely a question of dislike;" she saw something in her niece which made her add, "is it not?"

Claire's lips quivered, and tears gathered in her eyes. She no longer looked steadily at her aunt—her glance wavered.

"My own sweet child," whispered, softly and pityingly, her aunt.

Claire glided from the stool on which she was sitting, and, putting her arms round her aunt's waist, knelt down, burying her face in Madame Beaudouin's lap.

In the close embrace expression was confused, and it was in answer to an almost inaudible question that the words,—

"*My cousin Victor!*" dropped from Mlle. de Clavreuil's lips.

Her position prevented her from perceiving the darkness of the shadow which fell over Madame Beaudouin's countenance.

At the end of a moment or two,—

"Darling," said the latter, "it would be next to impossible to persuade your father to consent. You

know the dread, the horror everyone in your family has of your mother's father, and of the name of Lancour, and all the glory won by Victor's father goes for nothing with them."

"I know it all," said Claire, raising her head, "and I know how unjust, and foolish, and wrong it all is; for one day in London (when papa took us to the Exhibition) I fell upon M. * * * * *'s history of this century in France, and found out what other people think of my grandfather, and what a noble citizen he was, and what a patriotic minister; and as to Victor's father, the General, he was a hero."

"But all that will not prevent the determined refusal to consent. General de Lancour, your mother's brother, was extravagant, and spent largely. Victor's fortune is small."

"So much the better," retorted Claire, radiantly. "I am rich; and, as you say, aunt dear," added she, with *naïve* selfishness, "your fortune makes of me a great heiress; that is why you have a right to interfere—that is why all depends on you, aunt dearest;" she added, beseechingly, "let me owe the happiness of my life to you. What makes you look so sad and so severe? am I so very guilty?"

"Sweet darling child!" said her aunt, "I must know all; has Victor himself had a part in this dream? Are you agreed together? You must tell me all, Claire."

The girl hung her head, and bashfully recounted the few nothings which to her pure sense seemed as

evidences of love: a hand she once thought he had pressed, a flower he had given and she had treasured, a word, a look—a girlish dream, fondly interpreted.

"And that is all?" gravely asked Aunt Clémentine.

Claire turned pale.

"All?" echoed she, in a frightened accent, "does it seem to you so little?"

"Thank God! My Claire," said Madame Beaudouin, solemnly, and with eyes full of tears, "it is nothing!"

Mlle. de Clavreuil sprang to her feet, and with a resentful air and tone—

"Aunt," she cried, "you have not kept faith with me, you are in league with my father and mother, and plotting my misery with them; but my mind is made up: I will not marry M. de Beauvoisin, whatever scandal may ensue."

"Oh! Claire! My darling, listen!" replied Madame Beaudouin, with mournful earnestness, "your cousin Victor cannot marry—cannot love you. He is fettered by one of those chains—"

"Some infamous creature, whom he despises already!" burst forth Claire, tossing her head proudly. "One of those incidents in a man's life which his wife cannot even condescend to hear of!"

"Alas, alas!" resumed Madame Beaudouin; "a lady like yourself, Claire—a young and beautiful woman—misguided, weak, and, at last, guilty! She left her husband, and has been, for three years, in all but name, your cousin Victor's wife—he cannot abandon her."

"And he loves her?" repeated slowly Mlle. de Clavreuil, who, except that she was of an ashy paleness, seemed to have recovered her usual dignity of demeanour. "She probably was married as my mother wishes me to marry;" this was somewhat bitterly said. "So Victor loves her?"

"I firmly believe he does," replied, sadly, Madame Beaudouin; "and, although the knowledge wounds you now, my child, be merciful, and think that to the unfortunate who has paid for Victor's love with all she possessed, with her whole self recklessly, his love is the one only compensation."

Claire walked to the window and looked out. It was one of those soft, mild, violet-bringing days of February, that are not uncommon in Paris. The sun shone brightly, and the sky was evenly blue.

The windows of Madame Beaudouin's room (the house stood in the Avenue Gabriel) commanded a view straight across into the Champs Elysées. There were carriages passing to and fro, and horsemen, and loungers on foot, and the whole scene wore that peculiar air of gaiety that the first smile of early unexpected spring imparts. The sun was everywhere; on the broad spaces of the great thoroughfare out of doors, on a Claude Lorrain upon the wall of the apartment, on the broad leaves of the plants in the *jardinière*, and on the red-brown arabesques of the grey carpet.

Claire stood full in the broad, bright ray, when she went to the window; and, in the warm, balmy atmosphere of that room, in which everything told of wealth

and comfort, and in the golden radiance which wrapt her round as she stepped into it, Mlle. de Clavreuil, I assure you, felt as desolate as did the sloppy, draggle-tailed girl whom we have seen struggling along, one rainy night, on the road between Clavreuil and St. Martin.

That evening, Claire announced to her mother that her resistance was at an end, and that she was ready to marry the Marquis de Beauvoisin; but she would answer no questions, and returned her mother's embrace somewhat coldly.

CHAPTER VII.

Two Mothers.

FOURTEEN months passed by, and Mlle. de Clavreuil had been married more than a year. The wedding tour of the Marquis de Beauvoisin and his wife had been made to Italy, and they had passed the whole summer in Rome; or rather, whilst Claire remained stationary there, her husband made short journeys from place to place: to Ravenna or to Naples, to Palermo or to Pisa. People said Madame de Beauvoisin was wrong; that to stay in Rome during the hot months was insane for a woman in her interesting condition, and that the Marquis ought to prevent it; but Rome seemed to exercise some invincible attraction over Claire, and between her husband and herself there was apparently such an imperturbably good understanding, that it would have been difficult to imagine even a discussion arising between them.

The winter after their marriage was passed by the young couple at Nice; and it was only towards the middle of April that they returned to Paris.

Very late one night there was a great noise and bustle at the Hôtel de Beauvoisin; heavy gates were opened and swung-to, doors were slammed, lights moved behind all the windows, there was a tramping of feet,

and a tempest of voices of every possible tonality and accent. The master and mistress of the house had returned from abroad with a numerous retinue.

"Of course, you have seen them?" said a lady who came at five o'clock next day to visit Madame de Clavreuil.

"I went at twelve o'clock to-day, immediately after breakfast," was the reply.

"I went at nine—considerably before," was the rejoinder.

The lady who came to visit Madame de Clavreuil was no other than the Marquise de Beauvoisin, the mother of Claire's husband, a very remarkable person.

Mademoiselle de Moranges had brought to the man to whom her hand was destined one of the largest fortunes possessed by any of the (then) great heiresses in France. This fortune, joined to her husband's, she had found means, by her clever management, to augment in a very considerable degree; for she was, as her brother was wont to denominate her, the first man of business in Europe; and M. de Beauvoisin, soon convinced of this, retired from the exercise of any control whatever over his property, and left all in the hands of his extremely sagacious spouse.

This prize notary, as some one else called her, was early left a widow, and she at once took the necessary measures for preventing her son from in any way meddling in her plans of government. She had him educated strictly according to the method, every detail whereof she laid down; and she had him, at the same

time, carefully kept out of the way of the gains of our age; and morally, she put him by, as it were, so that the fresh air of the soul's life never reached him. When he attained to man's estate he was mentally musty—the inward man was wizened. Outwardly he was remarkably handsome, stronger and healthier than the ordinary run of men of his age in France, better mannered, and politer. He was a tolerable shot, rode well, spoke little and lazily, took no genuine pleasure in anything, and adhered scrupulously to all the external forms of religion.

Madame de Beauvoisin was usually quoted as a mother who had performed wonders in the education of her son. It was esteemed a model education.

One of this lady's qualities was early rising. She got up at five o'clock winter and summer, and never stayed late anywhere, ignoring theatres, and eschewing balls, which enabled her to get through an unheard-of quantity of business.

Madame de Clavreuil smiled as she said,—

“Was any one up at Claire's when you went?”

Madame de Beauvoisin sneered as she answered,—

“Of course they were all still in bed, but I have seen them since. Do you find Claire altered?” she added, fixing upon Madame de Clavreuil a searching glance.

Searching, was in reality the most appropriate term for Madame de Beauvoisin. In her sharp chin, and pointed nose, and above all, in her piercing black eyes, there was something strongly detective. She was said

not to have been ugly in her early youth; she was certainly plain now at somewhat over forty-three; for an attack of small-pox some dozen years ago had, without precisely marking, muddied her complexion, and nothing relieved or softened the sharp outlines and hard features of her face. She was not devoid of what the French call distinction, to which her most intimate friends declared she had no right, seeing that her mother, the late Madame de Moranges, was Mlle. Letourneur, the daughter of Louis Simon Letourneur, the regicide member of the Convention, born and brought up as a bailiff, and grown rich by the most mysteriously nefarious practices. However, as far as the exterior went, the Moranges blood had neutralised the blood of old Letourneur, and although Madame de Beauvoisin might be an unpleasant, she was not a vulgar-looking woman.

Unpleasant she was, and as she sat there, irreproachably dressed, swathed in stiff, black brocade, and a white bonnet, elegantly austere, surrounding her coal-black hair,—as she sat there, looking through Madame de Clavreuil, you might have fancied she was a member of the old Venetian Council of Ten in disguise, or a collateral descendant of the Spanish Grand Inquisitor under Phillip II.

“Do you find Claire altered?” she repeated, for her question had not been answered directly. “I don’t mean in looks—but in manner.”

“I perceived nothing extraordinary in her,” replied the Countess, “I thought her looking a little thinner, a little paler perhaps than when she left, but her con-

finement would account for that—no,” continued Madame de Clavreuil, as though she had reflected well on what she was saying, “I don’t think I perceived any change in her manner; she was always very quiet, you know, and of course marriage makes a great difference, and I have not seen her since her wedding-day.”

“Nor I either,” resumed the Marquise, with a malicious twinkle of conscious superiority in her eyes, “but I see the difference in her. I tell you, my good friend, that Claire has acquired such an amount of confidence that she will try to go her own way, and that it will be a hard matter for you and me to make her go ours.”

“Ours?” echoed the Countess in astonishment, “but I don’t want her to go my way. I don’t want to lead her. When one marries one’s daughter, one ceases to direct her.”

“That is,” interrupted Madame de Beauvoisin, “that you regard the establishment of one’s children in the light of a deliverance—most persons do—I don’t; and I repeat it, if I am not mistaken—which I never was in my life—we shall have a hard time of it to make Claire go our way.”

“But I really have no way in particular,” objected Madame de Clavreuil gently.

The Marquise surveyed her all over with a glance of contempt which she did not see.

“Indeed?” she retorted. “Well, I have. I do not intend that the magnificent fortune I have given Claire the enjoyment of shall be mismanaged.”

"But surely Olivier will see to that," observed Madame de Clavreuil.

"Olivier!" exclaimed the Marquise, with a smile of disdainful surprise. "Well, I should have given him a strange education if, having me for a mother, he should dream of managing his own affairs; but it would be a pity that his wife should make any silly attempts to meddle in what does not concern her, or imagine that she can exercise a will of her own—" (Madame de Beauvoisin said this in a tone of semi-compassionate warning more disagreeable than any overt menace)—"it would really be a pity. Her son's fortune must be, when he comes of age, the double of what Olivier's now is, and it is my determination to make it so; but I mean to set to work my own way, as I have always done hitherto."

"Talking of that," interposed Madame de Clavreuil, rapidly, and as though she were glad to turn the conversation into another and less personal channel, "what do you hear of this extraordinary *liaison* of your brother's?" We shall see soon that this refers to Madeleine Raynal, whom we left looking for charity in the mansion of Baron de Sauveterre, and who is now befriended by the Marquis de Moranges. "Is it true that he commits the follies that people say?"

Madame de Beauvoisin's brow darkened, and an unquiet light flashed from under her eyelids.

"What do people say?" she echoed; "that he has bought the diamonds and rubies that I prevented Olivier from buying for his wife! Well, it is abomi-

nable, no doubt; but if that is all, it must be put up with. Men have done worse than that, and yet left the object of their lavishness to die of starvation. Maurice was not by nature sentimental. The only tiresome part of the business is, that he has changed all his habits. I never see him now—do you?" she said, very abruptly.

"Rarely," replied the Countess; "you know he never was much with me; but I will tell you who sees more of him than any one—my sister-in-law——"

"Sainte Clémentine!" ejaculated impatiently the Marquise. "That is just one of those anomalies I never can comprehend; the way in which sinners and saints congregate together is to me inexplicable; the indulgence the saint has for the sinners, and the attraction the sinner feels for the saint, is beyond my philosophy—but so it is; you see it every day in our society."

"Do you know how your brother himself explains it?" inquired Madame de Clavreuil, smiling; "he says it only happens when the saint is an unmistakeable saint, and the sinner an unmistakeable sinner."

"Well," rejoined her friend, "I will accept Maurice's canonisation of Clémentine so long as I may count upon his own total impenitence."

The Countess started back in horror.

"Dear friend," resumed Madame de Beauvoisin, rising to go, and laying one finger of her pearl-grey glove upon Madame de Clavreuil's arm, "our neighbours' vices are the salvation of us righteous people.

If Maurice has not thoroughly perverted that woman who is with him now, he is no longer the illustrious man he was; and if he has done so, she will easily be detached from him, and he will be as easily reattached to some one less remarkable—for remarkable I believe she is—and in that way my grandchild will inherit what legitimately belongs to him, which I am resolved upon it he shall do."

"Where did he pick up that dreadful creature?" inquired Madame de Clavreuil, with a shudder.

"The Sphinx, as they call her?" replied the Marquise; "well, there lies the great mystery. No one knows; he tells nothing; and all at once she appeared and was famous. It is said old Sauveterre knows all about her. However, rely upon me, my dear, the Sphinx shall not deprive my grandson of his inheritance."

And with that the Marquise departed, leaving Madame de Clavreuil thoroughly uncomfortable and uneasy.

Both these women had had precisely the same education; it had narrowed both; but the narrowness had hardened one, weakened the other, making of the one a dangerous, of the other a useless person.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Husband.

A FEW days after the conversation we have recorded between the Marquise and her son's mother-in-law, Olivier was seated in his own apartment, on a very low chair before the fire, one foot on the fender, the other on the marble column which supported one side of the mantel-shelf. More distant from the fire another man was seated on a rocking-chair. It was the Count Dupont de Laporte—the Henri whom we have already seen in company with Olivier at the Château de Clavreuil, when Madeleine Raynal passed out by the stable-yard, and was called ugly by one of the friends, and curiously beautiful by the other. It would be too much to say that the two friends were now talking together, they were smoking in concert, nothing more, excepting only that the man on the rocking-chair was evidently occupied in observing his companion.

There were no flowers in the room, or it would have had all the appearances of a woman's abode, so richly was it furnished, and so numerous were the knick-knacks of all species which lay about. Neither were there any books—not one—but there was a piano, the exterior whereof was marvellous; it was of the

most complicated inlaying, every precious wood that is to be found in the two hemispheres furnishing its quota to the flowers and leaves which twined themselves in garlands on its surface. Over the chimney-piece was a blind of the most costly oriental workmanship, hiding the eternal piece of plate-glass from which no salon in the modern dwellings of Paris seems fated to escape. The luxury of the furniture was distressing; blue and silver brocade everywhere, on the sofas and chairs, and on the window-curtains and *portières*. The carpet was a couple of inches thick, like moss, and had taken twelve months to make; it cost a fabulous sum. Clocks of all forms and dates were to be seen upon the walls, and watches of every description were to be found upon the tables. They all went, though they did not all of them strike. M. le Marquis kept a servant on purpose to wind them; he was a man of reliable character who drank only water. The ceaseless ticking of these chronometrical engines made a kind of atmosphere, a kind of eternal hum, not soothing, like that of busy insects on a hot day, but unbearable to people of nervous susceptibilities.

There were, as I said, no flowers, but all the perfumes of Arabia, and of everywhere else, were by turns burnt in that chamber, helping to thicken the air and to make it unwholesome. False taste was everywhere, the only healthy and gentlemanlike (because the only genuine) thing in the whole over-scented, over-crowded, over-heated place, was the smell of the cigars the two men were smoking. After attentively surveying his

companion for some time, the man on the rocking-chair broke the silence.

"And so," said he, "with a slight tinge of irony in his tone; "Italy did not lay hold of you with teeth and claws, my good Olivier."

"Well—you know—really," replied M. de Beauvoisin, with a kind of involuntary embarrassment, "it is so uncomfortable; so little like what one is used to at home; the cookery is dreadful, the theatres are odious, and the houses, with their great enormous empty rooms and galleries, make one wretched—there is nothing modern about it all—nothing of our time! But tell me, what do you think of Claire, now that you have seen her."

The Count Dupont de Laporte took his cigar out of his mouth, and looking full at Olivier,—

"What do I think of her?" he repeated, gravely. "Why, do you suppose one judges one's friend's wife as one would a horse?"

"Well! I'm sure I don't know," replied the other, "but I should have imagined there was but one way of judging anything, and that was by looking at it."

"If that was all, it would be easy enough in this case," observed Count Dupont, "for anything more lovely than your wife can scarcely be conceived; as far as seeing goes, you forget I saw her once before—at Clavreuil, at the visit I paid there with you just on the eve of my last journey to the East;—but tell me, Olivier," he added, somewhat abruptly, "are you satis-

fied with the outward beauty only? have you gone no deeper than that?"

The Marquis fidgeted about on his chair, bent forward, threw the ashes of his cigar into the fire instead of into the old Sèvres dish at his elbow, and did not apparently know what to reply.

"Mind! Olivier," resumed Count Dupont, "I did not broach this subject; it is far too delicate a one in my estimation (and a thousand times more so since I have seen the Marquise), for me to have ventured to hint at it."

M. de Beauvoisin deliberately laid down his cigar, put his two hands behind his head, and leant back on his chair in what seemed very like excessive lassitude.

"My dear Henri," groaned he, "it is for that reason that I asked you what you thought of Claire: for to say the truth I don't know what I think. I'm very much puzzled, and sometimes almost alarmed."

"The world says you live happily together," remarked Henri, "is that not so?"

"Perfectly so," was the rejoinder, "it is impossible to agree better than we do. Claire's temper is the sweetest in the world, and we have never had even a discussion since we married; she always does everything I wish, and I never heard her make an objection to anything."

"And yet you are puzzled and almost alarmed?" observed his friend, with a curious expression of countenance. "Ah—you don't know how she will get on with your mother, you know your mother's spirit of

domination, and you do not know the real character of your wife."

"That is exactly the case, Henri!" exclaimed M. de Beauvoisin, with a sudden expression of relief at having his perplexities so clearly explained to him. "The truth is, that I feel as if I did not know Claire at all!"

"Why should you?" demanded Dupont.

"Well, I suppose when people are married—" suggested Olivier, "I suppose they get to know each other."

"Do you?" retorted his friend, in rather a bitter tone. "What! you fancy the marriage ceremony is a manner of Open Sesame to the whole nature of a human creature, who till then was a stranger to you! You think that, without your giving yourself any trouble, the woman who has the honour to be your wife must necessarily put you in possession of the secret springs of her whole being! There's the dishonesty again, for in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, you put her in possession of just nothing at all."

"No! my dear fellow, it is not that," objected the Marquis, confusedly. "I don't mean to exercise any superiority over anybody—I never did—it is not my way; I leave Claire free as air; but somehow when people are married they ought to get to know each other."

Henri Dupont got up, walked to the chimney-piece, set his back against it, and gazed down at his

friend, who was still lolling back in his chair, with his two hands under his helpless head.

"So it is not even the lordship of the husband that you assert," said he, with a compassionate smile. "You fancy that by the simple virtue of the marriage act two people who ignored each other totally the day before, are on the morrow to know each other thoroughly, and be able to count upon each other in all emergencies; humph! an easy process to be sure! but, my good Olivier,—does your wife know you?"

"But there's nothing to know in me!" answered the Marquis, innocently. "I'm not a mystery. I'm like everybody else."

Count Dupont laughed.

"And Madame de Beauvoisin is not exactly like everybody else," murmured he.

"There is her defect," propounded the Marquis.

"Eh?" demanded Henri. "What?"

"I say there is her defect," repeated Olivier.

"Well, let it pass: there is her defect. Have you anything in common, Olivier, with your wife? I mean any idea or opinion, or occupation, or habit?"

Olivier sighed and scanned the ceiling with a troubled air.

"Well, I'm sure I don't quite know," he replied; "but I don't think we have much. Claire reads a great deal, and she has a reputation for being a great musician; but the music she likes would drive me distracted, and the music I enjoy, I, somehow, don't venture to propose to her to come and hear. Why,

now, since we came back I've been four times to *La belle Hélène*, and, I can't explain why, I have never offered to take her with me; perhaps I'm afraid of her wanting to take me to the Conservatoire. Then, again, she don't care for horses,—knows nothing at all about them." And suddenly springing from his seat, "Look there!" he exclaimed, drawing up the oriental blind over the mantel-piece, "Look what my mother arranged for me during our absence!"

Count Dupont turned round, and through the plate glass surveyed a magnificent stable, where twelve horses were to be counted, each in a wide loose box.

"Princely!" he remarked; "but I'll bet any money there's not one of those animals that any real horseman and true lover of horses would be likely to rave about."

"May be!" rejoined the Marquis; "but such as they are there's not one that cost under seven thousand francs; three cost twelve thousand, and one twenty!"

"Again I say, princely!" repeated Henri. "And unluckily, then, your wife doesn't care for horses?"

"No! and I don't really know how we shall get on!" (It seemed his pet expression.) "My dear fellow," he exclaimed, disconsolately, "life is so tiresome! the day is so hard to get through! Suppose, now, that Claire should not get on with my mother! Suppose we should be having scenes, you know! what would become of me? if this were added to all the boredom of

life, it really would be too much; and I confess that one or two slight things I have remarked alarm me. My dear Henri!" this took the accent of a fervent appeal, "do become a friend of Claire's; try to make her out; you know you are so clever! and make her feel that my mother must not be opposed."

"A pleasant task, truly!" retorted Henri Dupont; "to mediate between two women, one of whom is your mother! I will put my life in danger for you any day, my good fellow, but subject myself to the feminine cross fire you kindly propose, this I beg to decline."

Before M. de Beauvoisin could follow up his request, three or four young men were ushered into the room, and Count Dupont de Laporte, after exchanging greetings with them all, was making for the door.

"Don't forget, Henri," cried Olivier, "that you promised Claire to take a place in her box at the opera to-morrow evening."

CHAPTER IX.

La Traviata.

It was an extraordinary representation that took place that night at the opera; one of those entertainments for which people take tickets as they do in an excursion train, whizzing and whirling through the domain of art as through many lands, getting a vast deal too much of what is indifferent to them, and little or nothing of what they may really care for, all which considerations will never prevent the tickets from being taken, and the places filled. Unheard of attractions had been grouped together on this night, and after Joachim, and Vivier, and Bottesini—(it had even been said that the Abbé Liszt would at a certain moment appear in the orchestra-stalls, in his white Dominican robes!—a manifest invention!)—after all this, and a great deal more, the whole was to wind up with the *Traviata*, sung for this once by Christine Nilsson.

The few hundred individuals who compose what is called all Paris, were in a compact body at the opera on this occasion. The merest stall cost forty francs. How was it possible for any one aspiring to a reputation for fashion to avoid being seen there?

The box taken by the Marquis de Beauvoisin was on the first tier, between the columns. The two front

seats were occupied by Claire, and an acquaintance of hers, whom we have seen once before, Mlle. Elise de Fréteval, now Duchesse de Varignan. Her husband, a man of past sixty, was a near relation of Olivier's; had, for two months filled the post of ambassador from France to one of the Northern Powers, just before the fall of Charles X., and was looked up to in his own set as a political luminary. He was now a martyr to rheumatism, and never accompanied his wife upon the evening expeditions, whereof she undertook a plurality every night. M. de Beauvoisin had so marked a preference for the society of Madame la Duchesse, that he was for ever suggesting to his wife to invite her, which Claire invariably did, with the utmost apparent alacrity. It was remarked that whenever Madame de Varignan was present, Olivier seemed at his ease—to say he was lively would perhaps be an exaggeration; but he did not sleep, or even yawn; followed the conversation without visible effort; and, in short, it was generally supposed that the Duchess knew how to draw him out, though what the result of this operation might be, remained a mystery to all save the initiated. At all events, Claire seemed pleased that her husband should have an agreeable companion, and accordingly Madame de Varignan was a constant guest at the Hotel de Beauvoisin. The Marquis called her cousin, she sometimes called him Olivier, for she had a free-and-easy way with her, and she said he was the best-natured fellow in the world. Between the two ladies there was no intimacy. The Duchess characterised

Claire as pedantic and dry. Claire never spoke of Madame de Varignan at all. It was not her custom to speak of people, but rather of things; nor was she, of her nature, talkative.

How I wish I could paint Claire de Beauvoisin as she appeared to those who saw her on the night in question! No lovelier sight can be imagined. It was not the fairness of her features, the harmony of every line in her figure, or the perfection of the colouring, that so charmed you in her; it was, united to all these, something else undefinable, something that seemed to shine through her from within. There lay, as it were, a bloom upon her soul. There floated around Claire such an atmosphere of purity, that when she entered a room, you thought you scented the breath of field-flowers. The sensation she brought to you was as of fresh air. And yet, though all was healthy, pure, fresh, and full of youth, all was not joyful in her. Claire rarely laughed; but her sweet, calm face, seemed always about to light itself up with a smile. The expression of her eyes was a serious, if not a sad one.

As the two feminine occupants of the box between the columns took their seats, it would have been hard to say what made the difference between those two women so enormous. They were not glaringly unlike each other. Madame de Varignan was a little stouter and more developed than the Marquise; her features were rather more marked, her hair a trifle darker; but the general outlines, the cast of the head and face,

and a certain air, appeared to a casual observer to be nearly the same in both. The impress of the time, which forces a certain degree of resemblance on those who live together in the same centres, had set a similar mark on Elise and on Claire, but the similarity vanished at the first glance of real scrutiny. Madame de Varignan, in spite of all her fashion (and she was most fashionable), had in her an unmistakable element of coarseness, whilst Claire was refinement itself.

The Duchess was magnificently dressed in white satin, trimmed with marabout feathers and lace, and besides flowers and plumes, the plaits and curls of her hair were looped up with strings of pearls, which she took care you should know were all real. Pearls were all over her, and, like hail-drops, rested on neck, shoulders, arms, and head. From the mere milliner and dressmaker point of view, I am bound to say that Madame de Varignan's toilette was a success; but of the profound art and exquisite taste with which Frenchwomen used to combine their external attire, there was not a trace.

To the fluffy, fussy, furbelowed costume of the Duchess, Claire opposed a simplicity that would have been excessive had not the result been so charming. On her neck rested just one string of large pearls, fastened by a single diamond that flashed like a star. In the thick heavy tresses of her fair hair, not a jewel or a flower was to be discovered—she wore the crown Nature gave her, and disdained all foreign ornament. Her dress, of white gauze, trimmed with Alençon-point,

floated round her cloud-like. She needed nothing beyond. Gems and flowers were alike superfluous, for she herself was the flower and the gem.

Between the acts of the opera, visitors thronged into Madame de Beauvoisin's box, for Claire's beauty divided the attention of the house with the heroine of the stage. It was her first appearance before the great fashionable public since her return to Paris, and she excited as much curiosity as admiration.

Count Dupont de Laporte, who had accompanied Olivier and his wife to the theatre, was occupied in answering Claire's questions touching divers celebrities, who were to be discerned, whether in stalls or boxes.

"I wonder," said she, "who that hand and arm belong to. Look; in that box just in the direction of the stage boxes. You can only see an ungloved arm and hand—the curtain of the box covers the person they belong to—but there is a bracelet of rubies and diamonds upon the arm that is absolutely royal."

Henri Dupont set his glass at the box pointed out, and,—

"That," said he, "is M. de Moranges', your uncle's, box."

"Yes," added the Duchess, fixing her glass upon the same spot; "and that bracelet is a part of the ruby and diamond *parure* which ought to have been yours, Claire. Now you see where those sort of things go to."

Claire blushed deeply at the indelicacy, as she

thought it, of Madame de Varignan, and drew back slightly behind the red silk curtain of the box.

"Those sort of things," she repeated, "are perhaps better placed as they are. I do not worship jewels; but," she added, "I thought I saw my uncle in the orchestra stalls just now."

"So you did," rejoined Count Dupont. "I met him just after the first act, and he told me he was coming here."

"Why, I should hardly fancy M. de Moranges would have the bad taste to parade in the face of all Paris in the same box with the Sphinx, on an occasion when everybody who belongs to society is sure to be present."

The Duchess made this remark as though she were giving Claire a kind of lesson.

The door was opened, and the Marquis de Moranges entered, accompanied by another man, some twenty years younger than himself.

"Victor!" exclaimed, gladly, M. de Beauvoisin, holding out his hand to the new comer, with what, for him, was an unusual degree of animation. "What an age since we met. We've been home nearly ten days, and I have not seen you yet!"

Having shaken hands cordially with Olivier, the new comer advanced a step, and bowed to the two ladies in front, extending his hand first to Madame de Beauvoisin, then to the Duchess, who greeted him with overt, nay, almost noisy delight. He then turned

again round to the Marquise, put out his hand a second time, saying,—

“My dear, dear Claire! my dear little cousin, what a real pleasure it is to see you back once more amongst us;” and, with a smile of frank good humour and frank regard, “how’s the baby?” he asked, bending down towards the young mother. “You know I’m not over given to care for those imps; not at all learned in infants; but your baby, Claire, that is something perfectly apart from every other in the world. I don’t feel that the wee thing is only my second cousin, but decidedly my nephew, and my nephew I mean to call him. How is my nephew, Claire? what is his name?”

“Pierre,” replied the Marquis. “Come and breakfast to-morrow, and you shall see him, Victor. I know nothing about such things; but my mother says he is splendid, and just what a Beauvoisin ought to be.”

All that Victor de Lancour had been saying to Claire was said with such genuine fondness—he was really so glad to see his cousin, and talk to her of her child—that he did not perceive with what indifference she met his advances. She replied to him by a few words, but never once looked at him, keeping, on the contrary, her glass riveted to her eyes.

“What’s that you’re saying?” demanded, suddenly, the Marquis de Moranges of a fair-haired young gentleman, who was standing behind him, taking to Henri Dupont.

“I was saying how divine the Nilsson is in the part of Violetta.”

"Hein?" retorted M. de Moranges.

"Well, he said divine," remarked Count Dupont, laying his hand good-naturedly on the youth's shoulder; "that is a term permitted in the vocabulary of the rising generation."

"Undoubtedly," sneered the Marquis; "for it is a generation glorying in anomalies, and taking nothing as it is. If a man plays a violin you say it is like a flute; if a ballet-girl dances well you say it's like music, or painting, or something else; and here, again, with the Nilsson. You call her divine—granted; I've no objection whatever. I dare say she is divine, angelic, anything you choose; but she's not the Traviata."

"Naturally," observed the Duchess, "that is so like you men; you are such realists—so wanting in all delicacy and in all genuine refinement of taste where women are concerned."

"I beg your pardon, Madame la Duchesse," retorted the Marquis de Moranges; "there is no man who does not appreciate true delicacy, true refinement; but we know the secret of life in its various phases, and don't like to be cheated. The general public likes to be interested, moved, impressed by the incidents in a Traviata's life, than which, generally, nothing can be less interesting; and to obtain this result it has recourse to a deceit—it fashions to itself a creature that never existed—can't exist."

"How moral my uncle is!" murmured Olivier.

"Moral!" echoed M. de Moranges, shaking his head; "well, never mind; I have nothing against

Traviatas, neither am I an unbeliever in a real affection in a woman's heart, but I cannot tolerate a wolf being taken for a lamb, or a lamb for a wolf—I will not be taken in if I can help it. Now the Marguerite Gautier of the Nilsson is false; it is somebody else; it is the violin that is a flute. The Marguerite Gautier you are so charmed with, is a pure, well-brought-up, honest young lady, who has had what is called in adventure—she has been unfortunate in love—but she is not a *Dame aux Camélias*."

Count Dupont nodded his assent.

"What! you, too, agree with M. de Moranges?" exclaimed the Duchess.

"I can't help myself," answered Henri; "what he says is true."

"Well, what is it then that is wanting in the Nilsson?" pursued Madame de Varignan, turning round so as to confront the talkers at the back of the box.

The three men looked at each other significantly; and, with a cynical smile,—

"Just what I cannot explain to you, Madame la Duchesse," replied M. de Moranges, bowing low.

"Nonsense!" was the retort. "One can hear anything."

Claire lowered her glass, and, after a passing glance at the Duchess, cast an involuntary look at Victor. He looked grave and was silent.

"I will tell you what is wanting in the Nilsson's *Dame aux Camélias*," volunteered Henri Dupont; "it is

the red mouse that escapes from Gretchen's lips on the Brocken; Goethe, who knew all the things in man's life, didn't omit that."

"Gretchen is no Traviata!" interposed the fair-haired youth, who seemed well read.

"Isn't she, my boy?" asked M. de Moranges. "We will discuss that together twenty years hence. For the moment I adhere to what M. Dupont has so ingeniously expressed; the red mouse fails the Nilsson; listen to the cold, crystalline purity of her virginal voice! there is no red mouse there."

"But, after all, what is the red mouse?" demanded the Duchess, imperiously; "and can't one do without it?"

The curtain drew up for the last act.

"Let us get back to our stalls," said the fair-haired youth, anxious to lose not a note of his divine prima donna.

"The red mouse is the sign of the species," declared Count Dupont, as he made way for M. de Moranges to pass.

"And there is no Traviata without the red mouse," added the latter as he left the box, and bowed respectfully to his niece, and with a curious expression of countenance to the Duchesse de Varignan.

There was ere long a great crowd on the staircase and in the vestibule, and people talked with each other as in a drawing-room while waiting for their carriages. All at once,—

"Who is she with?" asked a voice in the group of men close to where Madame de Varignan and Madame de Beauvoisin were standing.

"With old Sauveterre," was the reply.

"Of whom are they talking?" whispered the Duchess to Olivier.

"Look up the great staircase," he replied; "don't you see?"

"The Sphinx! well, the creature is singularly handsome to-night—handsomer than usual," added Madame de Varignan. "Did you see her last Sunday at the races?"

"No; this is the first time I have ever seen her," and the Marquis gazed intently upon the object of discussion in question.

"She had on such a love of a dress," continued the Duchess; "a sort of cloak—pure eighteenth century—in pale blue satin, bordered with old lace. I've had it copied, only mine will be crimson embroidered with gold."

Madame de Beauvoisin, who had been all this time determinedly talking of music, and comparing Italian and German masters with those around her, turned quickly round at these words, and surveyed Madame de Varignan with a look of indescribable surprise. It was almost haughty in its mute indignation.

Towards the middle of the grand staircase stood the person every one was more or less busy with. There were but few people behind, the crowd lay beneath her, and at each instant gave passage to men,

famous in the annals of mere fashion, who pressed forward to speak to, and be recognized by her. Of the strangeness of her aspect there could be no doubt, but was she beautiful? She produced the effects of beauty—and that sufficed.

She was of middle height, and apparently well-proportioned, though the furs and lace veils which wrapped her round, rather hid the lines of the shoulders and neck. Her dress, of deep red velvet, was gathered up in heavy folds in front and held by an ungloved hand, unhealthily white like unto ivory, and on the wrist whereof blazed the rubies and diamonds which had excited Madame de Varignan's envy. The hood of a lace veil she wore had fallen back and left her head uncovered. It was a singular face that met your eye there, and one that explained her surname of The Sphinx. The complexion was so pale that the masses of fair hair did not confound their tints with the hue of the skin, but seemed to surround the alabaster mask with a mounting of shiny gold. The mouth, the chin, and form of the jaw, all this was, if not faulty as to outline, suggestive of unpleasant ideas; the nose was long, thin, and rather pointed; the eyes, dark, and deep set, as stars seen at the bottom of a well, and, drawn sharply over them, the stern, straight line, not the arch, of an implacable eye-brow. When you had once allowed your gaze to rest on this woman's face it was not easy to detach it, curiosity held you captive, as at the approach of whatsoever seems mysterious.

"How well that diadem of rubies and diamonds suits her," said Olivier.

"Yes," murmured the Duchess, pursuing her old idea; "you have seen that diadem before now, my dear—handled it—and if you had chosen, it would have been a marchioness's coronet," and she gave Olivier's arm a malicious little tap with her fan.

There was a movement in the crowd, and several people went to their carriages. This brought the Sphinx into close proximity with the groups below.

"Yes! she certainly is beautiful," said M. de Beauvoisin, loud enough to be heard.

The Sphinx scanned the speaker of the words with a singular look.

"How that red velvet suits her," he continued; "she is superbly dressed."

"What aptitudes you men of our day have for millinery and dress-making!" said Madame de Varignan, half-contemptuously.

The swaying of the crowd brought the red velvet robe just now in contact with Madame de Beauvoisin's pure white dress. Claire did not draw back, or seem offended. There was no dread of contamination in her air, no scorn, nor curiosity, but the deepest compassion in the tone in which, turning her head aside, she said—

"Poor creature!"

Had the exclamation been heard?

A pink flush spread for one second over the pale features, and from the dusky caverns of those strange

eyes, a glance shot forth that went wandering over all those around.

"There can be no doubt about her beauty," vouchsafed M. de Beauvoisin.

When the crowd had nearly dispersed, "Olivier," whispered Count Dupont, laying his hand on his friend's arm, as they stood for an instant near each other, "I know her! that is the girl you and I once saw in the stable-yard at Clavreuil. She is to be recognised out of a million!"

Olivier shrugged his shoulders in disdain of the ridiculous supposition.

CHAPTER X.

Madame Claudine.

THERE are some things concerning which the world preaches ignorance as a proof of purity. Yet no one denies that science has been the cause of the gradual disappearance of some of the worst physical evils man inherited from his fall. Leprosy was not cured by averted heads and delicate cries of Don't let's look at it! And not the corruption only, but the complicated mechanism of modern society has engendered a moral leprosy which no one denies, which every one says ought to be cured, but which an infinitely small number alone will consent to study. And where so many hundred thousands of our fellow-creatures are concerned, where so many lives are wrecked, so many souls imperilled, and such incurable misery entailed upon the innocent, nay, upon the unborn, it is but fitting that some knowledge of the cause of evil should be acquired. It is not from the sin itself that we turn; on the contrary, there never was a time in which, throughout Europe, it was so much talked and written about. Neither do we recoil from certain incarnations of the sin when they are sufficiently magnificent. Just the reverse: for in that case our best and purest—our mothers, maidens, wives—jostle the sinful in the crowd,

and speak of them as of any other sight, which it may be fashionable to see.

Neither have we any repugnance for the death-beds of the sinners. When it comes to that, with or without repentance, we all of us fancy ourselves in earnest, and, pretty nearly all of us, do our best.

But all this assumes the evil itself as a sort of necessity. Now, that is not enough. It is not enough to rail against the sin in its splendour, as is the delight of powerful preachers, nor to rejoice over the conversion, in death, of the penitent sinful, as is the wont of sweet preachers:—what is required is some knowledge of the incitement to sin, some clue to what may lead to the prevention of it. At this Society shrugs its shoulders, averts its head, says, it probably can't be helped, opines, above all, that the less said of it the better, and, worst of all, implies, by all its acts and all its arguments, its intimate conviction of the irresistible charm of Evil.

We are learning every day, but our learning is lame and halt, and our acquisitive forces don't pull steadily together. We have pretty well mastered the fact that disease is not, *per se*, but means the incapacity of resistance of the diseased. There we stand still.

Evil has no charm, *per se*, but feeds itself into power upon the incapacity of good. Vice, which we moderns are daily more and more bowing down to as necessary, is a negation. Of itself it is not. Strengthen Right, and there would be no wrong. These are the truths we seem to avoid.

Science and Charity are our only helpmates;—not the bare science of statistics, that satisfies empty heads with the mere arithmetic of demoralisation; nor the bare charity of almsgiving, that satisfies empty hearts at the mere cost of coin—but the Science which teaches why and wherefore Evil is resorted to as a refuge; and the Charity which furnishes the means for achieving a larger, stronger capacity of good.

Madeleine Raynal, whom we have last seen in the company of M. de Moranges, was, when at the opening of this tale she asked for help from the Baron de Sauverterre, utterly helpless. This is a word often lisped out in the pretty parlance of our drawing-rooms, and, like many others, profaned by those who know nothing of the awful expression they are playing with; but who among the crowd we are accustomed to live with ever realises what it is to be completely helpless,—that is, without bread when hunger tortures, without warmth when cold numbs, without another human being on whom to lean when all power of self-support is giving way? No food, no roof, no raiment, no sympathy! we none of us know what that means, and we all of us, everyday of our lives, talk of it as if we did. We invariably condemn as if we possessed a mathematical certainty of the adequacy of the powers of resistance to those of attack, which is what we never do. We talk of Temptation, and Weakness, and Vice, and Virtue, as if they were one and immutable, whereas they are individual and for ever varying.

We have all of us been tempted, as it is inevitable

we should be, being men; we have many of us succumbed; and where we have been victorious, *we* knew at the time what the victory cost us—but we forget it. Integrity is a hard word for poor mortals; and the thing itself is a hard thing to be conceived or compassed: for, with his ever-warring body and soul, his latent instincts and factitious wants, his ignorance, his vanity, and the perpetual disproportion between his ideas and his circumstances, it is next to impossible that a mortal should be whole; yet Integrity, forsooth, is what we imperiously demand from miscellaneous mortals, not one of whom resembles his fellow.

We know, in reality, of no temptations save those we have yielded to, or withstood. We know what has tempted us—nothing more, and thereupon we judge. We know pigs are not tempted by pearls, but we don't for that think the higher of the pigs; and we do think the higher of ourselves because we are not tempted by garbage; which is foolish and unjust. What is above or below, or in any way beyond us, escapes us. We neither like to believe in the exceeding purity which Evil attracts not, even through the medium of curiosity; nor do we choose to recognise the total defencelessness of those who have literally within their grasp not one single arm wherewith to resist evil.

Try to catch a pike with that diamond crown—before which I should tremble for the integrity of our friend the Marchioness—he passes it by; but grub up out of the mud a big, bloated worm, and offer it him,

and see how, drunk with desire, he swallows it, and is caught. Of course you despise the pike for being so low down in the scale of creation; but he is true to his fish-nature, and gulps down what to him, is life, being devoid of the lights which would show him you are bringing him death. And how many are the thousands, nay, hundreds of thousands, of our fellow creatures who are left so destitute of all help and all comfort, so steeped in ignorance, so unarmed in the face of wrong, that to the low level of their life-development, the fat worm of the pike is the true temptation?

Is this their fault? must it always be so? and is there no possible prevention of sin?

I again say it: on the night when Madeleine Raynal found herself in the vestibule of the Château de Sauverterre, and felt on her cold, wet face the warm steam of plenty issuing from the open dining-room, she was craving for food, shivering with cold, and frightened out of her ordinary senses by the notion of Denis Perrot's violence. She was thoroughly helpless.

When Madeleine was helped, she was thankful, that was all. She went but once more to the sabot-maker's. It was on the morrow. She went to say good-bye, and to say she should never come again. They asked no questions, the mother or the son; neither as to where the girl had been the day before, nor where she would be the day after. It is true the mother Perrot looked wistfully, pityingly at her; but inquiries were forbidden by the uneasy glances of her son, which seemed to seal her lips. When Madeleine

shook hands with Denis, he muttered something about gratitude, and meat and wine to restore his strength, which Madeleine answered by giving him the five-franc piece she had herself received the night before in the stable-yard at Clavreuil. The sick workman took it eagerly, thought it, in one and the same second, enormous, and then less than it might have been, and modified what began like a leer of knowing contempt into what ended as a smile of obsequious deference. The sick sabot-maker was the first who saluted the girl's good luck.

The widow Perrot kissed her in silence.

I am bound to say that there was nothing particular to observe in Madeleine after the great change in her fate—I mean nothing as far as philosophy or psychology went. She was, alas! morally and psychologically unsatisfactory, for, in fact, psychologically and morally, she was not.

At first she was not enraptured, either by her fine clothes or by her luxurious abode (a hotel in a busy street in Paris), or even by the varied aspects of Paris itself. She was in no wise ashamed, or remorseful, or conscious of degradation. She was conscious of having been saved from starvation, as people who have been saved from shipwreck, and from the danger of preying upon their own kind, are conscious of the rescue of life. She was, as it was her nature to be, dull, and her mental perceptions were slow and dim.

At first—pray forgive me for recording it—at first, what she did was to feed herself! She ate flesh, and

game, and fowls, and truffles (which she did not like), and drank Bordeaux, and felt well; and, after the long, healthy slumbers of famishing eighteen, woke, to eat again, and found it pleasant.

Remember what this girl's life and education had been, and see in what measure the genuine comprehension of good had been cultivated in her—how far it was possible that she should understand the admirable exhortations, whereby you would induce her to forego her present comforts and luxuries rather than stain her soul.

Her soul! what do the teachings she has received teach her of that?

And the fault is the same everywhere. When mothers in the high social spheres tell you of the freedom their children possess to choose their partners in life, they unconsciously equivocate, for the natures of their children have been fashioned in such a guise that what fails them is the capacity to be free, as in the lower spheres what fails is the clear, well-defined knowledge of the true and of the right.

When the hour of temptation comes, there is nothing to fall back upon. Evil is the refuge, between which and suicide, nothing is.

And then Society appears with its well-meant, silly remedies, applicable to the effect, and leaving the cause untouched. And when it has to chronicle the perpetual reversion to sin of its momentary converts, it moans over the ingratitude of human nature, the degeneracy of our age, and the strength of evil, just as

octogenarian absolutists twaddle over the manifest victory of the devil in the advance of political liberty. Try education as in America—wholesale; real *bonâ fide* education, by which the superior utility of good is mastered. Teach the truth of religion; strengthen faith by knowledge; show the piety of toil, and boldly proclaim the bare fact that Providence does not desert those who do their utmost (less will not do); teach this in all its forms, to high and to low, so that the women of the more fortunate classes may know how to help their poorer sisters. Do this with heart and soul, and with intelligence and method, and your midnight tea-parties and your whole mistaken system of antidotes to sin will be superseded. School-houses and associations for the employment of women will alone prevent the sin; and prevention, in this case, is all you have to look to, for cure is next to impossible. Deal with the root of the evil—cut it; but don't think anything can be done with the evil itself if you allow it to be, and to grow. Above all, don't disguise it, or seek to beautify it. Don't represent it otherwise than it is. It is very ugly.

As soon as Madeleine had attained to the physical equilibrium which is termed health, and which was afforded her by food, wine, sleep, air, exercise, and quiet, she began to take delight in the beautiful clothes which were brought her, and in the beautiful house in which she lived; and though, in her innermost conscience, she did not think she ever achieved as much show as she would have liked, yet so thorough was her

gratitude to M. de Moranges, who took possession of her, so absolute her submission to his smallest wish, that she tried not to long for the gaudy apparel and villanously unartistic accoutrements in which she met those of her own species in public places.

As is so often the case (if not even always) this girl was chiefly riveted to her sin by what was best in her. And do not forget that, my friend, when you are trying to upset some evil: look out for the good element that has got mislaid amongst it, and is feeding the evil with its strong sap; it will give you more trouble than all the rest; the more so, as it hurts your conventional ideas to recognise it.

In Madeleine's ill-regulated mind, gratitude to M. de Moranges predominated over all else. She thanked him for life, and for the enjoyment of living; for food, clothing, and a home; for the sense that she was admired, and treated by those who approached her with respect. From the time she awoke till the hour when she closed her eyes, there was no moment in which she did not feel that she was grateful to M. de Moranges: materially grateful for hard matters of fact—for, to her mind, her position was splendid: the position of the conclusion of fairy tales, a vague impression whereof lies, more or less, at the bottom of the mind of every child of no matter what degree.

Madeleine devoted herself as to a duty to the task of thanking M. de Moranges, and to this task brought all the resources she could dispose of. The chief of all was obedience. She was submissive as a spaniel.

The Marquis had, in the beginning, asked her if she had no other name than Madeleine, and she had replied Yes; she was also called Claudine after her father.

"Then we will call you Claudine in future," had said M. de Moranges; "it is better than Madeleine."

"Why?" asked the girl.

"Well, because I like it better," replied the Marquis, with a smile.

That was sufficient. She was for ever more Claudine, and Madeleine ceased to be.

I repeat it: she gave herself up to the task of thanking M. de Moranges; that is, she gave of herself all that she knew.

The woman was dormant in Claudine.

CHAPTER XI.

Imitation Respectability.

It was an odd mixture of feeling which prompted M. de Moranges to what he did in regard to Claudine. M. de Moranges was a man of refined taste, and a cultivated lover of the arts, and when, in the vestibule at Sauveterre he caught sight of the wet, dirty, shivering girl who asked for help from starvation, his attention was arrested and held captive by the strange beauty of certain lines. His first thought was of a statue he had long dreamed of, and could get executed nowhere. He had met in Rome with a sculptor who seized the idea but failed in the execution, and who admitted that the total want of a model was his difficulty. The idea was Goethe's *Euphorion*, the child of Faust and Helen, the offspring of Antique Beauty and Modern Thought, the sexless, ageless, product of the contact of two worlds. Here was the model found; here was the possible realization of the artistic dream.

Henri Dupont, who was a younger and a far less experienced man than the Marquis, had simply reverted to a known type, and been reminded of the Medusa. M. de Moranges sought the form for an Idea, and found it, as he fancied, in the sharp, pure outlines and intensely painful expression of a face suddenly brought under his notice.

The first impression was purely artistic. The second was of a very complicated nature.

When the Widow Raynal's daughter had been provided by the housekeeper at Sauveterre with dry and decent clothing, and when she had supped and slept, and came the next morning to speak to her benefactors, the effect produced on the master of the house and on his visitor was a very different one.

The former was struck only by her wan and exhausted appearance; her pallor and her emaciation fairly frightened him: the latter saw far beyond all these, and was irresistibly attracted.

The girl was young enough, in spite of what she had suffered, to look better even by daylight than lamplight, and what would inevitably be her future beauty asserted itself in spite of her squalor.

The Marquis scrutinised her as though she had been a picture.

"Just wrap that round you," said he, taking a cover of crimson silk from a table, and tendering it to her, and when she had done so, throwing the folds back from her head,—

"Yes!" he added, musingly, and as if speaking to himself, "her natural background is red—a deep Titian red; the pale fair lights of the skin and hair detach themselves so finely, whilst the dark brown-gold of the eyes harmonises so well."

And then he talked to her for some time, and told her she must be called Claudine.

M. de Moranges was fifty-five, nor did he look

younger. He had been one of the handsomest men of his time, and would probably continue to bear witness to that fact to his last hour, for his was the superiority of feature and of air. He possessed the art—without which even the greatest man would scarcely be great—that of imposing his individuality upon his fellow men. Whatever he did that was wrong (and he did much) was excused because he did it, and nothing that he did passed unnoticed. Society had adopted him for one of its spoilt children, and he treated Society with a high hand. Unmarried and enormously rich (though he had considerably damaged his fortune), he still remained an aim towards which tended the spirit of gain and enterprise, and to attain which all mothers of families were ready to send forth Argonautic expeditions. But the real superiority of M. de Moranges lay in the belief the world had that he could do without it, whereas he did not believe the world could do without him.

The Marquis had tried many things, but there was one thing he had not tried, and towards which—like many men of his age and temperament—he had a strong and secret leaning: namely, towards the fashioning of a human creature for his own exclusive benefit.

And so, hardly avowing the fact to himself, he took Claudine, and resolved so to set his impress upon her, that she should to him be exactly what he chose, and to the whole rest of the world be nothing.

Here again you have the inconsistency and dis-

honesty which is so curiously at work in the present day in France.

What M. de Moranges wanted was a home, a centre round which he could group whatever external elements best pleased him, but the price to pay for this is marriage, and that price to the Marquis seemed intolerably too high. He, who would not have borne a copied picture on one of the walls of his dwelling, agreed to regard as genuine this copy of an institution, and he decided upon attempting to defraud Truth of its rights by obtaining from a make-believe that which the real thing alone has in its gift.

For a year Claudine was trained and put into the hands of the first dressmakers in Paris. She was taught to dance, and to walk, and to hold herself, and to eat properly, and a writing master tried to make her write neatly, and a professor of literature made her read, and endeavoured to awaken in her the comprehension of what she read. As she had a beautiful mezzo-soprano voice, a singing master was applied to, and every day two hours were spent by Claudine, one in learning to sing, the other in learning to play.

Well, it was rather a slow process; for as I said, the girl was by nature dull, but she was perfectly obedient, and in all things did her very best.

At the end of the year, Claudine made her first appearance in the world of fashion, and produced so decided a sensation that M. de Moranges was deeply gratified, and felt assured he had not made a mistake. The centre he had desired was found. To his hotel

in the Rue de Grenelle every man of any name or distinction in France came readily; his dinners were what some few very old men among his guests said Talleyrand's had used to be, and Madame Claudine was accepted as the presiding deity of the Marquis's table and household, with all the outward semblances of unflinching respect.

Claudine's home and mode of life were austere, exceedingly. Of women, none were ever invited to the Hôtel de Moranges, nor did she know other than by name the frail goddesses of that impure Olympus, at the summit of which she was herself placed in public opinion.

Claudine was so content, materially speaking, so full of wonder still at the grandeur of her position, that she had had no opportunity of knowing whether time hung heavily on her hands; she had, as yet, no consciousness of *ennui*. One unsatisfied desire Claudine had, which has been already mentioned; she would have liked more show. If she had dared question the supreme wisdom of her benefactor (such he was to her, pray do not forget that), she would have felt herself somewhat aggrieved by the severe simplicity to which she was mostly condemned. She did not avow it to herself: but she did in reality pine for finery. All her points of comparison, taken from without, marked down finery as a species of right, and something within her—something that was never still, suggested that no amount of gorgeous clothing was sufficient to cover the poverty of the past.

However, the Marquis was inexorable—gently so, but inexorable on this subject; so Claudine was sentenced to be the best-dressed woman in Paris, without any power to appreciate it; neither would he consent to her being called Madame de Sainte Amaranthe, for which appellation she had a truly vivacious longing. These were the only points on which M. de Moranges and Claudine ever differed; but her attempts to obtain what she wished were, after all, but feeble ones, and so matters remained as they were. But Claudine had a companion.

There was in M. de Moranges that undying sense of the respectable which never leaves a Frenchman, and with which the perpetual business of his life is to reconcile the most irreconcilable things. What seems fitting, what seems proper—that is the domestic religion of the whole race, and from that faith nothing has ever weaned them—not even the scaffold of the Reign of Terror, nor the saturnalia of the goddess Reason. A Frenchman's mind—his entire nature—are con-centric, not ec-centric; he revolts from all eccentricity as unfitting, unseemly, and whatever his acts may be, he contrives so to shape them that they shall be shut in within the bars of the Procrustes bed of *les convenances*.

Now no amount of preaching would have made M. de Moranges abstain from the indulgence of any one of his vices; but the most unlimited indulgence of these vices never carried him away, never made him concede one iota in matters of taste, and while outrag-

ing Virtue at every hour, and in the very depths of his conscience, his outward life was devoted to the scrupulous worship of the idol, Seemliness.

Madame Claudine was, as it has been stated, the presiding deity of the household; and what a household! From attic to cellar, every detail defied scrutiny, every service was complete. Severity was the ruling characteristic. Equipages. liveries, furniture, plate—all was severe; but of such a splendid severity! And in that whole household, all was so nicely calculated that the slightest derangement would have caused incalculable confusion. But nothing was ever known to have been deranged; derangement of any kind would have been contrary to the traditions of the house. When Madame Claudine was appointed to the Favouriteship, it occurred in a quiet, seemly way, and was altogether a transaction full of dignity, and if she had the requisite aptitudes, there was no reason why Madame Claudine might not become a perfect model of good breeding and graceful manners: a person to be copied by all those who aspire to the regency of drawing-rooms.

As was said, Claudine had a companion, and it was the Marquis's first difficulty. He thought it fitting that the person who presided over his household should be accompanied wherever she went, and he accordingly looked out for the proper species of matron to attend upon her. He wished her to be matronly, as that was more respectable, but in this emergency, respectability signally failed in the high duties of its calling. As soon as it was rumoured what M. de Moranges sought

for, the number of respectable ladies with interesting stories, and unimpeachable references, that succeeded each other was enormous, and the Marquis was shocked at the amount of dignity in distress whose representatives assailed him. He chose more than once, but each time unluckily, and respectability in these several elderly females laid itself open to the most grievous charges of corruption, and on one occasion made away with no inconsiderable amount of linen and plate.

M. de Moranges modified his tactics and conceded a point or two. Instead of seeking for the respectability which turned out to be a mere mask for speculation and intrigue, he decided upon trying what could be done in the way of relative honesty based upon self-interest. The plan succeeded better. A Paris tradesman's daughter, tolerably well educated, and whose experience of life was hard, a good-looking young woman just turned thirty, in whose composition sentiment had no part, undertook the charge of being companion to Madame Claudine. Certain unfortunate passages in this young lady's past, in which mere miscalculation had achieved the work of so-called devotion, had transformed her into a sworn enemy to all romance, and she earned her wages honestly enough, being in reality a safe companion and associate for Claudine. She dressed well, spoke, and even wrote her own language not too incorrectly, and was excellently regular in her habits. Her faults were that she was over fond of the minor theatres, and would persist in talking of her family, but on the whole she did well, and had been

six months attached to the household of M. le Marquis, whose superiority she fully appreciated without being overwhelmed by it.

This gentlewoman's real name was Mademoiselle Aspasia Mourjon, but she insisted on being denominated Mademoiselle de Mourjonville, and on this point she was stubborn. As she suited M. de Moranges in other respects, he gave in, and Madame Claudine's lady-in-waiting was officially styled de Mourjonville, which high-sounding title, however, merged, little by little, into that of Mademoiselle Aspasia, by which name she now usually went.

Whence had come the surname given to Claudine herself, none can tell. But so soon as at the *Italiens* and at the Opera, at the *Bois* and at the *Courses*, her face had grown to be familiar to the public, the appellation of the Sphinx had been awarded to her.

CHAPTER XII.

My Nephew.

THE day after her visit to the Opera, Claudine was sitting in a small boudoir opening upon the garden. The weather was unusually fine for April, and although a bright wood fire was burning on the hearth, the window was open, and the warm air came in laden with the scent of earth, and grass, and leaves, and alive with the songs of birds.

Claudine was alone; upon a table beside her were books and several sheets of paper, and she had in her hand a mother-of-pearl pen mounted in gold, which she was turning round between her fingers lazily. Her look was at once vacant and intent, and the only way to describe her would be to say that she was doing nothing determinedly. It was precisely this union of fixity and vagueness which made the expression of her face so strange. From the straight line of the prominent eyebrow, the dusky eyes took an air of depth that was more in their setting and their colour than in any particular meaning of their own.

As she sat there, with parted lips, and gaze intently bent upon the blue sky that was visible beyond the high wall of the garden, she seemed to merit thoroughly the name that had been bestowed upon her. It was

not the massive, heavy-lipped, heavy-eyed, heavy-featured, Sphinx of the sluggish Nile, but it was equally mysterious. The enigma was the same, but the modern enigma, dreamy and restless. It was something you could not make out, and which, for that very reason, attracted you.

Claudine was draped in the thick folds of a violet damask dress; she had no headdress save her own fair hair, which undulated naturally, and which every now and then the vagrant wind lifted from the pale blue-veined brow.

Two o'clock struck.

Mademoiselle Aspasia came in looking unamiable.

"Herminie is going," she said, rather sharply.

Claudine turned her glance from the contemplation of vacancy to that of Mademoiselle Aspasia's countenance—but said nothing.

"Herminie will go—she persists in going," reiterated the companion, as though she felt injured by the want of interest taken in her communication.

"I suppose we can find another maid to take her place," suggested Claudine.

"It is probable," retorted Mlle. Aspasia, "that when I have put all my energy into the undertaking, we may end by replacing Herminie; but it is the third time—and so it will go on to the end of the chapter—and M. le Marquis, and you, too, Madame, seem always to think everything is so easy! whereas, if it were not for my ceaseless labour and attention we should never

have a *femme de chambre* at all—I'm sure I work myself to death!"

Mlle. Aspasia's specialty was to persuade everybody of her indispensability, and of the large amount of her devotion to her employers.

"Why does Herminie go?" inquired Claudine lazily.

"Oh! for the same reason that they all go!" retorted the lady in waiting, shrugging her shoulders. "She says she wants to serve in a respectable family, and that if she stays here too long, nobody will take her."

Claudine opened her eyes, and looked as if she was puzzled, and did not altogether understand!

Mademoiselle Aspasia, who was not of her nature, taciturn, went on.

"Yes!" repeated she; "they all say the same thing; but it is only a pretext: the real fact is, they bore themselves to death; the house is dull! it is no use denying it; there's no movement, no amusement, no fun, nothing fast. What are they to do? What is to become of them? the house is dull!"

"Is it?" demanded Claudine, with a curious expression of face. "Well, what is to be done?"

"Nothing, Madame!" retorted authoritatively Aspasia; "there is nothing to be done but to go on changing! I had thought of proposing to M. le Marquis to get over an Englishwoman: they say they are steady, and can do without amusement; here it is next to impossible—in spite of the enormous wages they get, and

the comforts and luxuries, they none of them will stay! they seem to think it unjust; and they will actually rather sink down to being the maid of some stupid humdrum *bourgeois*' wife (with a chance of marrying the man-servant!) than be moped up, as they call it, with us. I dare say we shall be obliged to get over an Englishwoman in the end! Money, they say, will make them do anything, whereas, one can do nothing with a Parisian, if she gets no amusement."

During this tirade, Claudine had relapsed into her former distraught and vacant air, and Mademoiselle Aspasia now turned some portion of her attention upon her, casting a glance at the books and papers on the little table.

"Ah! ah!" observed she, with this time a good-humoured smile, but still with the same air of importance; "I see how it is! no lessons done; and M. Blanchon comes at half-past three."

"It is very difficult," objected Claudine, meekly. "I cannot manage it."

Mademoiselle Aspasia stretched out her hand, took up two books, and, seating herself, prepared in a business-like way to examine the task set down for the dull-brained pupil.

"Well," said she, holding out the smaller of the two volumes, "here is one you can do, Madame; it is merely to copy out this page of verses from—from"—and she turned over page after page. "Oh! I see! from the play of *Britannicus*, Tragedy by Jean Racine; that you can do; the verses begin here at the top of

the page," and she laid the book open at the proper place, and prepared the paper, and pen, and ink. "You need only mark each word well, and then copy it out exactly. The other lesson is more difficult—it is an analysis of a whole chapter of the History of Louis XIV.—twelve pages! and battles, and all sorts of things! However, I will see what I can do. We must try and manage it all between us, or M. Blanchon will be angry, and complain to M. le Marquis!"

And Mademoiselle Aspasia put both her elbows on a table in the middle of the room, laid the book down before her, and set to work tooth and nail, with the fierce energy of a clever Frenchwoman, who foresees a clear and certain gain at the end of the effort she is making.

The rays of the sun came in, and played with the light, crisply curled hair, that adorned Claudine's bending head, and into which her long, thin, ivory fingers, with pale nails, had, in sign of distress, twisted themselves. And the soft wind still brought in the scents of spring, and the songs of birds from the garden.

"Aspasia," said Claudine, after a period of application to her studies, which seemed to call for some relaxation; "it will be Easter week in a few days; one can't wear velvet after Easter."

"No, Madame! one cannot," replied Mademoiselle Aspasia, looking up from her work; "but one can wear other things—light silks, and muslins."

"Velvet is rich," remarked Claudine, with what for her was an emphasis; and whilst the hand that held

the pen glided listlessly down by her side, the other hand, half hidden in the flaxen braids, supported the head more firmly, and she looked fixedly at her companion, repeating her words.

"Velvet is rich—crimson velvet above all."

"Crimson velvet makes you look like a queen, Madame," observed Mlle. Aspasia, crossing both her hands upon the open book before her, and gazing straight into the very depths of Claudine's mysterious eyes.

"Like a queen!" murmured the latter, musingly. "Like a queen, Aspasia?" and this time she put the question wonderingly.

Mademoiselle Aspasia had picked up a pencil and was biting one end of it with her sharp-pointed teeth, whilst her sharp eyes (in which a minute observer might have detected a latent twinkle of self-satisfaction) never ceased watching Claudine.

"Well, like a queen!" she repeated; "and why not? Why shouldn't you look like a queen, Madame? There have been queens who were not ladies: and the proverb says kings have married beggar maids."

"Kings!" echoed Claudine. "Yes, I know, the proverb does say so;" and she fell to musing again, and looked dreamily at the blue sky above the garden wall, while the soft wind was again busy with the feathery tresses of her fair hair. "And I suppose the kings who married beggar-maids had seen them in their rags," she added.

"What on earth do the old rags matter?" exclaimed

the practical companion, with a sneer. "When they are once cast off, they're forgotten."

"You think so?" questioned Claudine.

Mademoiselle Aspasia laughed a laugh of contempt.

"Think so?" she retorted. "Yes, I fancy I do. No one has got any past now, thank God! A good past don't benefit, and a bad past don't hurt you;—and right lucky it is that it is so. People just live on what they are at the present moment, and it is their business to see that they make their present moment a prosperous one, and have plenty of everything, and are wise enough to lay by, so that the present may endure, and the past never come back again."

Mademoiselle Aspasia inculcated this lesson with apparently strong conviction, and, developing the theme complacently, added that personalities of intrinsic worth were what were to be mostly aimed at.

"M. le Marquis," opined she, approvingly, "is an example in that respect—all his tastes are so solid. I know the objection made is to their austerity—and, in some degree, I would myself object to that too; but his age and education account for a good deal. The men of his day were more serious, and held to repose and quietness as to a proof of good taste; but, however that may be, there is no doubt of the solid genuineness of everything. What plate, and linen, and furniture; what valuables! Ah, you are a fortunate person, Madame. I don't say you don't deserve your luck—but it is luck all the same—luck that makes you the object of universal envy."

Claudine listened silently, but with evident satisfaction, to this praise of her good fortune. After a pause, during which her memory, perhaps, recalled to her the comments she had heard, the night before, upon her own appearance:

"How my jewels are devoured by the eyes of all those fine ladies," she remarked: "I can't help seeing the sensation they create whenever I wear them. There was one woman in particular, last night, at the foot of the great staircase—a fine, handsome blonde, with hair covered with pearls——"

"And a satin dress, and feathers, and silver lace?" interrupted Aspasia. "Lots of hair, and lots of pearls—both false, I'll bet anything? One meets her always everywhere! It is that famous Duchesse de Varignan."

"*How* I wish I might be dressed like her!" sighed Claudine. "She is always so finely dressed!" and she added lazily, "I wonder what she would give to have my jewels!"

"Everything!" cried Mlle. Aspasia. "You should rather ask what is there she would not do?"

In which appreciation of our fair friend, the Duchesse, Mlle. de Mourjonville was singularly mistaken.

The noise of a door opening in the next room was heard.

Claudine raised herself from what had been a half-recumbent posture, and looked at the mirror over the chimney-piece, in which you could see reflected whoever entered the drawing room behind, and between

which and the boudoir there was one entire panel of plate-glass.

The Marquis de Moranges stepped through the open door; he was followed by another man, young and exceedingly handsome.

A flood of scarlet rushed over Claudine's pale face; and, in a tone of the deepest mortification,—

“Oh, if I only had on my crimson velvet!” whispered she.

The companion rose, and stood in an attitude of respect, as her employer entered.

M. de Moranges advanced with measured step and dignified air; and, with courtly grace, pointing to his friend, said, whilst bowing down to kiss Claudine's hand,—

“Permit me, madame, to present to you M. le Marquis de Beauvoisin, my nephew.”

CHAPTER XIII.

Musical Links.

THE Marquise de Beauvoisin, dowager, had been as good as her word, and at the end of a week or ten days after her conversation with Madame de Clavreuil, she had established so satisfactory an overseership upon her brother's actions, that nothing of what M. de Moranges did could escape her. How she continued this, we shall, perhaps, discover later. The Dowager de Beauvoisin was not a woman tormented with vain scruples where a great end was at stake; but it is certain that, without her brother's suspicion of the fact, she managed to draw him into the atmosphere in which she herself lived and moved. She was far too wise a woman to appear desirous of seeing more of him than he voluntarily allowed her to see, and she never made a single remark upon his comparative disappearance from society, or upon any of his habits or ways whatever. She, seemingly, took him as he was, and on all occasions met him with the blandest good-humour, not to say cordiality or affection. The widowed Marquise and her brother were too well bred ever to be cordial to any one, and they knew each other too thoroughly to be ever affectionate. But what the lady did achieve was, that they should meet on neutral ground nearly

every day. She caught M. de Moranges in the toils of relationship, bound him down by his family ties, being quite aware of his deep sense of social decencies, and of the sacrifices he would be induced to make to the fitness of things.

She herself never once invited him to her house, but on the occasion of Olivier's marriage and return home, she raked up every cousin, in no matter what degree, whom she could find, and impressed upon each several one the duty of giving a banquet in honour of the new-married couple, and of bidding to it all those who had the honour of being connected with the Beauvoisin race.

M. de Moranges never once flinched (his wily sister had rightly foreseen that he would not); in the name of his House he bore everything manfully, and ate six dinners a week (whereof five were generally bad) with people who suited him ill, and whom in his secret soul he wished at Cayenne, or anywhere, whence they would not be likely to return. But he bore it, and might, if he had cared for it, have had the satisfaction of hearing how he had charmed all the younger women, many of whom had met him for almost the first time, and all of whom lamented that he did not more frequent the world.

The Dowager Marquise, whenever she was within earshot of her brother, descanted upon social obligations; proved herself large-minded and liberal as to what regarded the conduct of her fellow creatures; said that lay between themselves and a Higher Power; and laid

it down as a law that a strong sense of what is due to the ties of family, a real respect for consanguinity, was all that could be required of a man of the world and a gentleman. It was pleasant to hear her discourse, her brother thought, for it helped to put him at his ease with regard to his blood-relations, and persuaded him he was behaving uncommonly well at an undoubtedly cheap price.

The only little bit of wickedness Madame de Beauvoisin allowed herself was, one day, after she had been declaiming over the admirable manner in which every relative, however distant, of their House had come forward, to turn to M. de Moranges, and observe, in a perfectly casual way, that out of the sixty-four or five persons then in Paris, who had asserted their connection with Olivier by feasting him and his wife, he, Olivier's own uncle, was the only one who had not given him a wedding dinner!

It seemed to escape the Dowager's lips—dropped involuntarily from them—but was said without the slightest accent of reproach or unkindness. It was a fine bit of acting, and hit M. de Moranges so hard from the point of view of social obligations, that, to rehabilitate himself in his own conscience, he would have consented to eat two dinners a day, if needful.

Of his new niece M. de Moranges approved highly, making this one reserve, that you never could know what a woman was till she was past thirty; but he only expressed this opinion of his to his most intimate associates, men of his own age and standing. Claire

pleased him very much, gratified his taste, flattered his self-love, and had for him something of the same charm that was exercised over him by her aunt, Clémentine. As for Olivier, he had long ago made up his mind that there was nothing at all in him, and the only curiosity he felt was to know how, with the education he had been subjected to, he would behave in certain crises of life, and whether sufficient honesty and principle had been instilled into him to enable him to pass through all ordeals like a gentleman.

And yet, with these doubts, and with the fact staring him in the face, of his nephew's education affording no guarantee for uprightness through life, M. de Moranges, had he had a son, would have brought him up exactly as his sister had brought up Olivier. And why? simply because that was the sort of education usually given to the sons of great families—to the young men of the class who consider it a distinction to do nothing.

M. de Moranges had been charmed with the dinners given him by his nephew and niece; charmed, because the cook at the Hôtel de Beauvoisin was a first-rate artist, that every detail of the service of the house was precisely as it should be, and that Claire did the honours of the abode with a grace and dignity which reminded you of the days (within his own remembrance) when the great ladies of France had been the great ladies of the entire world. Then, too, the Marquis was certain, whenever he dined at the Hôtel de Beauvoisin, to meet Madame Beaudouin; and we have been told how strong was the attraction this lady exercised

over him, how he enjoyed her company and her conversation.

So, in spite of all that the world said touching the Sphinx, in spite of the public scandal which clung to the Marquis's name and mode of life, he lived more with his own family than he had done for the last year or fifteen months. Thus far the Dowager de Beauvoisin had succeeded: she had managed to have her brother lured from his unsociable habits, and drawn back into the spheres where she could bring her keen spirit of observation to bear upon him; but this was but one portion of what she needed. When M. de Moranges left the places in which his sharp-eyed sister could study him, he escaped from all immediate action on her part, and she could not follow him into his own home. Her watchfulness then became necessarily indirect, or second-hand.

The Dowager took to a line of strategy with her son which, had his perceptions not been opaque, must have astonished him. She became full of tolerance for human errors, and said men were fallible and must not be too harshly judged, particularly by those who were younger than themselves. All this was imparted to Olivier alone—never in the presence of his wife, for she opined that the truth was not always to be proclaimed before very young women, for it might, by being misapplied, become dangerous.

Madame de Beauvoisin adopted the custom of frequently paying visits to her son in the blue and silver draperied room in which we have already seen

him, and the gaudiness whereof was entirely her work. She would just look in after breakfast, let Olivier go on smoking (though she abominated that habit), and retail out to him all the delicate tit-bits of scandal that might happen to be unpublished. His mother's visits always amused Olivier, and her talk set him at his ease, and delivered him from the trouble of thinking for himself.

She invariably mentioned her brother in terms of the sincerest regard, and contrived to allude either to the last time he had come to her son's house, or to the next time he would come there.

"He comes so often to you now," she said one day, on rising to take leave of Olivier, "that I sometimes think he must be a little hurt at the want of reciprocity—" and she hesitated.

"Reciprocity!" echoed M. de Beauvoisin, looking puzzled; "well! it's very difficult—I don't quite see how—" and he, in his turn, paused.

"Certainly," resumed the Dowager; "it is, as you say, with the good sense that characterises you—it is difficult; but I sometimes am inclined to fancy that your duty would be to stretch a point. After all, he is your uncle—your very nearest relation upon earth. I have always held that an uncle was nearer than a brother; he comes, in my mind, directly after one's own father; and then one must be indulgent, too! Such a deplorable connection as that of my poor brother's with that woman, once admitted, it is really impossible to arrange matters more respectably than he does, or

with a deeper sense of what is due to his own position and to society. You see, his influence in his department is still enormous; and when the elections take place, two or three years hence, he may be everything to you for the deputation, and one is bound to think of one's children before everything. You must think of little Pierre—it is your first duty. I assure you I have come to the opinion that it is wrong to neglect your uncle.”

Olivier was sitting with his legs wide apart, and his body bent forward, an elbow on each thigh, and his hands hanging down, than which scarcely any attitude expresses a more thorough emptiness of mind and absence of will. He stared at his mother, and propounded the desire never in any way whatever to neglect his uncle if he could only find the means to prove that fact to M. de Moranges.

“Ought I to go and dine with him?” he asked.
“If he asks you—yes: I think decidedly you ought,” had been his mother's reply.

“But Claire?” added Olivier, dubiously.

“I think I should not tell Claire anything about it. There are often things that a man may find it advisable to do, about which it would be unfitting that he should speak to his wife. The more I think of it, the more convinced I am that you are doing wrong to neglect your uncle.”

And on this idea the wise matron left her son, well knowing that, as his brain never took in more than one idea at a time, it would stick to this one

tenaciously, and probably evolve it into a practical result. And so it happened; and when Olivier seized the first opportunity offered to him by his uncle, and allowed himself to be presented to the Sphinx by M. de Moranges, he was, in fact, only following out the advice given him by the dowager.

After that first visit, M. de Beauvoisin returned frequently to the Hôtel de Moranges, dined there, or breakfasted, and grew to be a denizen of Madame Claudine's drawing-room.

Olivier, as we know, was not what is called bright, nor was perspicacity among his characteristics. He never remarked the curious glances which sometimes were levelled at him by Mlle. Aspasia, and which apparently denoted an intimate acquaintance with him, productive of an odd mixture of compassion and contempt. Neither had he ever observed the embarrassment of Madame Claudine in his presence—an embarrassment that endured long after Olivier had become a familiar visitor at the house, and which, while it certainly imparted a kind of awkwardness to her demeanour, lent her, at the same time, an unmistakable charm, inasmuch as it roused her out of her usual slow, sleepy, uninteresting manner.

From the very first day on which M. de Beauvoisin had been presented to Claudine, a link had been discovered between these two, and that link was music.

Alas! that it should be so; but so it is, and so it will remain, till the system is changed whereby in this

our day human souls are so foolishly or culpably tampered with by their so-called Instructors.

Fear being the leading motive of nine-tenths of all the actions committed in our time (at all events, in Continental Europe), you may set down whatever is allowed in education, to the desire of avoiding something worse. Throughout all Continental countries you will find fear actuating all educators—whether mothers, or priests, or the courtiers whose task it is to bring up princes. What they most fear is science, namely light. Therefore, having some vague notion that the faculties ought to be employed, they complacently guide them towards the fields of art, and let them feed there, deeming that innocuous.

What escapes them is the mysterious solidarity of our being, and that oneness-in-variety of our nature that may produce an explosion of genius in the brain from the mere material touch upon some conductor among the nerves. Of that electricity which is around us and within us, they know nothing, and when they have succeeded in comparatively swathing a mind in obscurity, they are stupidly content, and don't reflect that the soul's lightning flashes fiercest when all else is dark.

They shut out science, and fancy that the door opened upon art will let in no danger; calculating thus, in ignorance of the finely vibrating nerves which are reigning in the stead of the narcotised reasoning faculties. They will not see that passion is another form of genius, and that in nearly every human being

lies dormant some one dominant capacity. If a man be born to write the Symphony in C minor, you gain but little by bringing him up as a fool, or turning him into a dragoon, or an attorney's clerk; if the symphony be in him he will compose it, though with other elements, and it will come forth and terrify you in the shape of some formidable love, or of some crime.

And so on from top to bottom of the ladder. You gain nothing by darkening or shutting in the human mind; and the electricity is everywhere, which may dart along the hidden wires, and note down in the soul's telegraphy a tale which will frighten the timid cackling crowd of lookers-on from their propriety.

There lies something in every creature of our race. The business of the educators is to make that something aspire, and, in the end, attain to the clear comprehension of the inseparable oneness of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good. Where that is not done—beware!

There was something even in Olivier, even in Claudine, and, wrapped as it might be in the cereclothes of ignorance and false-teaching, that something lived on and was ready to assert its power of living, just as the grain of wheat, lying for five thousand years at the bottom of a mummy's tomb, asserts its force of being, the instant you put it into a handful of common earth.

Man has no more power to destroy than he has to create. He can pervert, nothing more. Nature has imprescriptible rights. And so, in these two ill-educated,

dark-minded human beings, betrayed, as they were, by those whose task it should have been to make them better, there was yet something, and that something quivered faintly into existence through the medium of musical sound.

Of such compositions as you and I, being educated people, dignify with the name of music, these two knew nothing—how should they? but in a lower kind of art they took real delight, and what was least material in them, found satisfaction in the second and third rate productions of a falsely sentimental Art.

Olivier played agreeably upon the pianoforte, remembered whatever he heard once, provided it was not what he called scientific, and whatever in him had been carefully turned away by his teachers from all grander, healthier currents, found an outlet in the performance of the musical compositions he understood or appreciated. Claudine took a deep and genuine pleasure in listening to him, and he was perfectly capable of enjoying the fine tones of her passionless voice. Olivier taught Claudine several abominably silly romances, but she sang them as would sing an automaton. Still the two went on making music together, and a day came when Claudine suddenly sang Madame de Rothschild's romance of *Si vous n'avez rien à me dire*, with extraordinary expression.

CHAPTER XIV.

Claire.

AND while all these things were happening around her, how was it with the young Marquise de Beauvoisin? How had it been with Claire, since she deliberately obeyed her parents, marrying deliberately the man she did not like?

The world would have told you she fared excellently well, and was what it is pleased to call happy. Claire, in her secret soul, thought hers a hard lot, and so perhaps it was, but much less hard than it might have been had she chosen. But Claire, like a great many other people, though she did a duty, did not do her duty.

There are far more of our fellow-creatures than we believe, who discharge what they impose upon themselves as duties; but there are fewer than we have any notion of who unflinchingly and thoroughly, and at the same time simply, discharge the duty which is theirs to be done: theirs and none others; specially set down for them, not to be accomplished by any one else, and which to them costs the dearest—costs, indeed so dear that they recoil and will not pay that price!

We have said that there was something even in Olivier, in spite of all the defects with which his edu-

cation had laden him. But that something, did Claire discover it? did she recognise that it was really there? would she have been gratified at its existence, or did she involuntarily cherish the notion of her husband's inferiority? This was difficult to find out, and the one man who was Olivier's sincere friend, who had been so from childhood, Count Dupont de Laporte, though he grew to be on terms of great intimacy with the young Marquise, somehow never cared to demonstrate to her that there might be more in her husband than she knew.

"I'm afraid she likes better to think lowly of him," he said one day to Madame Beaudouin who in true appreciation of his honest, upright character, had spoken openly with him of the young couple.

"Lowly!" Yes! there it lay! Claire liked to think lowly of her husband. It was her greatest consolation.

Claire was, in the common parlance of the world, and according to its ill-digested decrees, a woman all but perfect. The pure beauty of her mind was the Truth of which the pure beauty of her person was the splendour. Nothing was in her that was not lofty. Intellectually and morally she had no tendency that was not towards the elevated and the noble, but she did not do her duty, for all that, and perhaps because of all that. The plain duty of M. de Beauvoisin's wedded wife—which post she had in the end accepted, and which post it was forbidden her to desert—was to discover what was best in the man whose name she

bore, and exercise her influence daily to improve the something she had discovered. But this plain duty Claire overlooked, setting herself altogether another task, and strictly performing what appeared to her the duty. Instead of labouring to develop the dormant capacity of good in Olivier, and leading him by no matter how slow a process, if it were only one step higher up on the ladder, Claire unconsciously went on mounting round after round of the ladder herself, and could not choose but be content with what she achieved. She raised herself, yes! but she never endeavoured to raise him; on the contrary, she left him just where he was, and thought it right to subordinate her mere acts to his will, never disputing his authority, but never for an instant desiring that he should be so bettered as for her to esteem him. She obeyed him implicitly, but never did she, the most generous of her sex, practise generosity towards him. She never drew nearer to him, never drew him nearer to her; never held out her hand to enable him to try if he could climb, but soared herself and lost sight of him.

Claire de Beauvoisin laid out for herself a dead duty, and was for ever busy in offering up funeral sacrifices at its shrine. And this was natural, for perhaps the living duty, the plain simple duty of a less elevated woman would have been too hard for her to perform.

Therein lies the chief sin of those who undertake to dispose of the destinies of others without taking the affections into account. They place the poor weak

creatures that we are between the alternative of self-abasement or duty discharged in abhorrence. Love alone makes duty light; and, if you banish the love, our imperfectness must find some shape in which to assert itself.

Had Claire been perfect, she would have done all her duties as Olivier's wedded wife; she was imperfect, like all human beings, and did not do it. She paid what she thought her full tribute in material, smiling submission; but hoarded up all her real treasures and spent them on herself. She lived outwardly the life of the world, reaping universal admiration and respect. In her inner life, she lived aloof from all men;—alone, communing only with herself: and, in the existence her marriage had made for her, Claire, the refined, the intellectual, the cultivated, the high-souled Claire was as solitary, as completely exiled from woman's paradise, as was her dim-minded, ignorant, fallen sister, Claudine.

Of all who surrounded her, not one ever approached towards confidence with the young Marquise. With Olivier, as we know, she was all obedience; with her mother-in-law her bearing was a perpetually defensive one; with her uncle Moranges she was thoroughly charming, and almost natural. Henri Dupont she watched narrowly, and seemed upon her guard with. Towards her own mother she never relaxed, but behaved always with freezing gentleness and respect; with her aunt Clémentine, whom she now but rarely sought, she was mostly silent. These two seemed to

understand each other, and not to need words. They would sometimes pass a morning together, and not exchange ten phrases; but the embrace in which they folded each other at parting, said more than mere words convey.

It must not be forgotten that Claire's feeling towards Olivier was not simply indifference. Whatever she knew of her heart had been given to another; and the severe education of young ladies in France, and the practice by which they are secluded from the movements of the external world, were likely to increase rather than diminish the force of the first impression.

So Claire went on loving her cousin Victor—loving him with all her imagination, and her sense of disappointment. He was her illusion in life—her chimera; the representative of all that might and would have been happiness if——.

M. de Lancour, it must be avowed, was the very sort of person to provoke the admiration and attachment of such a woman as Claire. He was the type of such soldiers as Trochu would desire the French army to be composed of: modest and daring, gentle and determined, highly intellectual, yet physically reckless; and, from the age of nineteen (he had wilfully enlisted at eighteen), having won glory by exploits of extraordinary merits whether as to valour or military capacity. He was, besides this, remarkably good-looking, had winning ways with women, and had been brought up with Claire in all the sweet familiarity of cousinship.

A very unfortunate occurrence decided M. de

Lancour's private career; though it in no degree modified his habitual intercourse with his own relations.

Madame de Mottefort, the wife of the lieut.-colonel of a cavalry regiment in which Victor had just risen to the rank of captain, had abandoned everything in the world to prove to her lover of a day that hers was the love that never dies, but braves all circumstance. The sacrifice had been accepted. M. de Lancour was severely wounded in the duel he fought with M. de Mottefort; he was blamed, excused, condemned, absolved, but immoderately talked about. He exchanged into a regiment ordered off to Algeria, where his name figured foremost in nearly every order of the day; and whither Berthe de Mottefort followed him, and partook of his fame. They were supposed to lead a pleasant life; and the love these two felt for each other had so vindicated its strength, that it was admitted on all hands that Victor was one of the few who had found happiness in an illicit connection.

It was wrong, but successful so far. And Claire, whose love was born in ignorance, loved on when ignorance had ceased. Yes, Claire loved on; and nothing in her mode of life separated her from her love. She was preserved from all harm and from all suspicion by her marriage, and by the character she edified for herself. Her apparent duties were so scrupulously performed, she was so unimpeachable in her conduct as wife, mother, and mistress of a house, that M. de Beauvoisin was obliged to share the admiration of the whole world; and, sharing it genuinely, was often per-

plexed in the extreme at the small amount of domestic satisfaction, of home comfort, derived from the possession of such a matchless wife. In his own pet phrase, He couldn't make it out.

I am sorry to have to avow it, but her child did not fill up the void in Claire's life; did not compensate to her for the failure of other joys. She was too young as yet for the grand austere devotion to the creature that is to be the parent's work; and too highly cultivated to find solace in the doll-and-plaything-like affection of some mothers too early wived. Claire loved her son dearly, and was an excellent mother in every sense; but her son did not supply the place of everything else to her: neither did religion. Claire was sincerely pious; and, like most Frenchwomen of the present day, of an enlightened piety, knowing what and wherefore she believed; and believing devoutly, uncompromisingly. But faith did not occupy her totally. Faith underlay everything in Claire, her actions and her thoughts; but, above its firm foundation, there arose many and many an aspiration, many a longing, many a regret, many a dream.

Such as the young Marquise now was, it was probable she would always remain. Her health was excellent, she ate, drank, and slept well, and took a real interest in whatsoever might be interesting to a healthy, active mind. But her mode of life and her mode of thought were fashioned by something that lay within her, deeply hidden, which no one would ever divine, and which she would never put away.

Passion-week was drawing to a close, and Claire had, as is usual in France, spent a large portion of her days at church, not from habit, or for fashion's sake, but from conviction, and a strong love of Him who saved us. Not for that leaving any act of duty at home undone, but seeking honestly at the altar's foot the inspiration whereby to perform further duties.

It was Good Friday, and the sermon upon *The Seven Words* had come to an end. I should like to be able to say that it had impressed Claire, but that would be untrue; it had not done so for two reasons: firstly, because the preacher was a very inferior one, noisy, exaggerated, and empty of the awful glories of his text; and secondly, because Claire happened to be in a somewhat vacant mood, and not ready to apply her mind to abstract or contemplative uses.

When, towards the close of the day, the tones of the *Stabat Mater* rang mournfully through the dim aisles of the church, their solemn meaning came more home than any preacher's words to Claire's heart. She looked around at the void and desolate tabernacles, at the lone crucifix whence the Victim had been borne, at the rent veils which hung drooping over the stains of His blood, and she felt within her the deep truth of the tragic mystery, bowed her head down low, and wept with *The Mother* whom nothing can console.

But Claire wept not a mother's tears. That grief she felt not, nor could assimilate it to herself. She wept in sorrow over herself, and tendered her suffering, her very own, at the feet of Him who to redeem man

had suffered unto death. Claire was not impatient, but she was sometimes weary, and, like many of us, whether in sorrow or joy, she could not see the future other than as the present. To wait, to expect! she had not learnt that yet. For what was she to wait? Who should tell her?

Ask not the spent wave for what it bore not! Other waves will surge up on life's ocean, and lay their treasures at your feet. But Claire stood upon a lonely shore, as it seemed to her, and the spent wave had broken at her feet, and receded again, and brought her—nothing.

A chair was moved not far from her; its occupant had let her prayer-book drop, stooped to pick it up, in so doing disturbed her neighbours, and when she knelt again, resting her head upon her joined hands, the young Marquise saw her face and knew her. That face was familiar to her, for without any living being having been able to guess why she asked, she had taken care to have that face pointed out to her. It was Berthe de Mottefort.

Never, in any place of public resort, had Madame de Mottefort been in such close vicinity to Claire, and Claire's entire sum of attention instantly riveted itself on her neighbour. Perhaps she was scarcely aware of how utterly she forgot everything, in her intense desire to scrutinise Berthe; perhaps it was unconsciously that she deserted the mystery of her faith to fasten upon the mystery of her love. But she did so. She spelt every lineament of her rival's countenance as an eager

child labours to spell through the words of a tale which he knows contains a whole world of emotion for him.

It was a handsome face, but neither an intellectual nor a remarkably good face. It was marked, moreover, with signs of what the past had been. They were signs of anxiety rather than of suffering, signs rather of pain than of sorrow; there was trouble, evident trouble; but of regret, or of better things overthrown, of high aspirations laid low, there seemed no trace.

Claire did not first ask of her own judgment: Does he love her? but with the divine belief of woman in the all-compelling power of real love, she scanned every feature of Madame de Mottefort's face, and of every line and every look asked, Does she love him?

The something which lies at the bottom of nearly every woman's heart, and which, if she be a true and pure woman, and if she truly love, will not mislead her, gave Claire a negative answer. Then she read the face before her with another feeling; with that of pity—pity for him.

She, Claire de Clavreuil, in the days of her freedom, in the days of her innocent cousinship with Victor, and of her sweet, sweet dream, she had been worthy of him, and this woman, whom he loved, was not. Whom he loved? Yes! that was so—every proof was forthcoming of that truth, but he had blindly built his home at the gates of Paradise, whilst Paradise itself had been open to him. And this lesser love, this

sin-marked destiny, this was irrevocable, yet could have been averted!

When the crowd poured forth from the church, Claire followed Madame de Mottefort closely; watched her every movement, her every step. She was graceful, yet there was a certain abruptness in her movements, a certain want of dignity and repose. At the bottom of the steps leading up to the church they went their several ways, and Claire, having watched Madame de Mottefort get into her carriage, entered hers and drove away.

It was a bright spring day, when everything is full of hope and the promise of expanding life, a closing April full of the announcements of May. The sky was palely, tenderly blue, the trees tenderly and palely green, and the youth of the year was visible in the gladness of nature in that exquisite freshness, in that sheen of colours and light which does not yet glow, and which vanishes beneath the cumbrous tread of summer.

As Claire felt the light gladsome breeze upon her cheek, she shrank and drew up the window. As she marked the waving of the trees, with their pale plummy foliage dancing in the sun, she felt sadder than before, sick at heart for the shadow that lay upon her, whilst the bloom lay upon everything else. And, then, Berthe's handsome face rose up before her—the face which she felt had no promise in it for him—and the young Marquise leaned back in her carriage and wept for the happiness that was for ever lost to her cousin Victor!

CHAPTER XV.

Easter Sunday.

You must not take a false idea of Madame de Beauvoisin. She was not by any means a sentimental person. She was, as I have said, healthy in body and mind, she had that cheerful temper which is the result of this physical and mental equilibrium, and she was moreover perpetually occupied.

There lies one of the chief sources of whatever is best in France; the constant occupation of the women throughout the country. Inside the barriers which inclose what is termed constituted society, you will scarcely find an idle woman. In the lower ranks, courage in toil is a frequent and a never disregarded virtue, and you can award a workwoman no higher praise than to say that she is brave at her work. And God knows how brave they are, those poor women! and how they struggle and how they toil; and how, in the midst of all their own life-battle, they contrive to feel for their wounded comrades, and turn aside to help them. And so, too, as you mount from class to class of the social scale, in every division you meet labour cheerfully undertaken, and charity. Perhaps the portion of society which is, in the latter respect, least worthy, is the middle class. Of the higher and

the lower classes there can be no doubt they do more than their duty. But, in order to state matters fairly, let it be said that in the case of the upper classes this has a reason: they are, retrospectively as it were, on their promotion, their object is to prove by present deserts the injustice of the Past. Let that be, the good done is enormous, and such as other nations have but a small notion of. Whether that good might be more wisely done is a question, but if it might be, it assuredly will be, for the great wheel of advancement cannot be stopped.

As to the charity of the lower orders, from it nothing can detract, and it springs from a kindness of heart, from a ready sympathy with suffering of which we know too little in our island, so near in miles and so distant in mind from our French neighbour.

Perhaps, the lukewarmness of the middle classes (if there be such) in matters of charity may be traceable to a commencement of self-assertion not so frequent with continentals as with ourselves; perhaps it may be the beginning of a new social state of things in which less help will be afforded and more self-help achieved. There lies a tremendous problem to be solved.

At all events, in the actual condition of what is termed in France the world, a woman in the position of Claire de Beauvoisin has anything but a sinecure. In the first place, let what will be her amusements at night, she invariably gets up early; and, let what will be the amount of her fortune, she keeps her house.

People are ruined in France as in England, but not in the same way; not ruined without knowing it—sillily. You don't hear of families going abroad, because, somehow, it seems that they lived beyond their means. A Frenchman who has hardly any means at all sometimes speculates beyond his intelligence, and beyond his luck; but if he have large means, regularly to be disposed of, he seldom lives beyond them. Of course I speak of the large majority of families, and by a family I mean a married man with his wife. Unmarried men would seem, in French morality, to be accounted irresponsible; all manner of follies and mistakes are expected from them, which comes from the separation of life into two parts,—one reputed pleasant but not moral, the other reputed moral but having no necessary right to any pleasure.

Barring individual exceptions—of which a large number are to be found to every rule in every land—the large mass of French families with means verging on wealth, live in conditions of moral respectability surpassing what we designate by that word; and they owe this to the activity, to the inflexible spirit of order, and to the absence of all self-indulgence of French women. A genuine French gentlewoman regards self-indulgence, in no matter what degree, pitilessly, and recoils from breakfasting in bed, for instance, as from a crime! If you reflect upon this you may find in it the reason for some contrasts which seem to you irreconcilable.

Well, of these well-appointed, well-ordained house-

holds, Olivier de Beauvoisin's was a pattern; and in this lay Claire's satisfaction, and in this consisted her ceaseless occupation.

The number of servants was considerable; and there was not one over whose mode of life the active and conscientious mistress of the house did not watch. She was not tiresome or importunate with her dependents, but she made all around her feel that her support would never fail them; and she spread over the domestic community over which she presided a kind of atmosphere of maternal solicitude. Though remarkably quiet and gentle, the young Marquise was very firm; and, among those who served, none ever disobeyed her. She was, perhaps, even more respected than loved; but she was known by all to be justice itself, and impossible to deceive.

With the habits of life this exercise of government entails, with—added to the details of organisation and internal economy—the hours set apart for intellectual improvements and serious reading, and the discharge of the onerous duties attendant upon the direction of charitable foundations,—with all this, honestly, loyally, seriously carried out, it was difficult to cultivate what, in the life of a woman with more time on her hands, might have grown into a grief or a passion.

Claire was not what romancers would call madly in love with her cousin; she was not even in love with him. She loved him, as I have already said, dearly, deeply—would probably love him always; but she loved him as a widow loves her dead, as the represent-

ative of unachievable happiness; and she had too usefully busy a life to allow of any sentimentality, of any idle melancholy. Still, as Claire was a true woman, loving and tender, and formed by nature to radiate over the plenteous joys of a happy home, there were moments when the failures of her life were brought home to her, and when the heart-sickness of discouragement seized her. These moments were rare and short-lived, and she quickly and bravely surmounted them, and set to work again cheerfully.

One of the worst of these moments for Claire had been the being brought into such suddenly close contact with Madame de Mottefort on Good Friday, for to the feeling of her own loneliness had been added the involuntary conviction that Victor's life was wasted, and Claire, who could master her own ills, was weak at accepting those that should visit her cousin. She shook off her own trouble, but anxiety for his left a deeper mark than she herself was aware of.

When Claire de Beauvoisin summoned her husband to church on Easter Sunday, she seemed as perfect a specimen of womankind, surrounded by its sweetest attributes, as it can be given us to behold.

The church was near, and Oliver and his wife went to it on foot. So did most of the neighbouring families. It was a bright, balmy morning, and while the bells were ringing loud for high mass, you might, upon the sunny pavement of the adjacent streets, have met the proudest society of the world, grouped together in small knots, exchanging greetings as on the

return home from a journey (Lent is a sort of expedition), and talking so familiarly of subjects intimate, that a casual spectator would ask himself if he were in the midst of some provincial town. The talk was mostly of the rigours of Lent, and of the way in which each had supported them, and the joy and peace of Easter sat upon nearly every face.

And Claire and Olivier. Look at them as they approach, arm in arm; was ever a handsomer couple seen? they are so matched, yet, as we know, so sundered.

"They are a charming sight," said a lovely little old lady, all grey silk and white lace; "they took the communion together this morning, at early mass. I could not help watching them; it does one good to see—it's an example." It was the same old lady who had, when Olivier married Claire, hoped there was just a little bit of love between them!

"Yes, Madame la Vicomtesse," rejoined a tall, stiff, thin old gentleman, with a tight-fitting, close-combed, shining dark wig, "it is an example; and I rejoice to see that there is great improvement in that respect. There is a deal of religion in the young people of our world." The little Vicomtesse nodded assent, as she and her veteran companion paced measuredly on. "A deal of religion," resumed the old gentleman, "more than in my youth—I am ten years older than you, Madame la Vicomtesse. The young people are well brought up now a-days—severely. Look at Olivier, for instance. What a mother he has!"

"My cousin Clavreuil is a saint," objected the Vicomtesse.

"Yes," retorted her friend; "but the Dowager de Beauvoisin is a woman with a head—such a head! Madame de Clavreuil is, as you say, a saint; but so is the Dowager. Look again, I say, at Olivier. What an education! There he is, at nearly six-and-twenty, and as submissive and respectful as a young girl. He has never committed a folly yet; but, to be sure, what a mother he has!"

"They are a beautiful pair," murmured the little old lady, reverting to her first idea; "and they quite distracted my attention this morning at early mass, when I saw them coming together from the altar—a sweet sight."

Yes, it was true. No one was more exact in the performance of his devotions throughout the year than Olivier, and that morning he had, as is very customary, taken the communion at the same moment with his wife. And yet these two were no nearer! In that holy word communion had they found no import?

Of M. de Beauvoisin no complaint should be made. He had been drilled, not educated; premeditatively darkened by his trembling instructors, and sent forth into the world with a shut soul. But Claire? Alas! she had been so little used to believe that the love of the inmost heart ought to bind man and wife together; that wedlock without this love ought to bear another and a very different name; that she could kneel at the altar's foot, and, with all the wrapt piety

of a sincere and ardent Catholic, commune with her God, yet leave uncared for the poor, untaught, groping soul of the man who knelt beside her, and was her husband.

Yet in the world of Paris Olivier and Claire were regarded as a pattern couple.

As they were crossing the street opening into the square wherein stands the church, the young Marquise observed a man, who had stopped for an instant on the pavement opposite, cross rapidly in their direction. He was a short, squat, red-cheeked, bushy-whiskered man, vulgar in the extreme, with heavy gold watch-chains, and pale yellow gloves, a man who could not possibly have anything in common with the world in which Olivier lived; yet he came straight up to M. de Beauvoisin, put out his fat hand to him, and then perceiving the Marquise, took off his hat.

Olivier, having his wife on one arm, preferred touching his hat with the other, to accepting the proffered hand.

"Glad to see you, M. le Marquis! hope you're well!" said the vulgar-looking man.

Olivier bowed, muttered something in reply, and availed himself of the pretext afforded him by the number of persons on the pavement, to move on, without entering into further parley; but did not do so before Claire had had time to remark the strange alteration of his face. He had turned pale as death, and was now red all over the temples to the nape of his neck.

"Bon jour, Olivier! bon jour, Claire!" exclaimed

the Duchesse de Varignan, sprinkling her words over them like scented water, and half smothering them in the huge puffs of blue silk and enormous bows of blue ribbon, which swelled and fluttered upon all sides of her looped-up dress; and she passed on without noticing the fact of her salutation having met with no return.

"Who was that man?" asked the young Marquise.

"What man? who?" stammered M. de Beauvoisin.

"The man who spoke to you just now!" added Claire.

"Oh! that man—well—a man I once had some dealings with—" and Olivier hesitated. "Some dealings with about wine," he said this hurriedly, and apparently glad to have caught hold of a reply.

Claire felt that this was not true, but could pursue her inquiries no further. She was annoyed, and prevented from concentrating her attention, as she wished to do, upon higher things during the service in the church, by recurrence to the offensive presence of the fat, vulgar man who had dared to accost her husband in the public street.

Her husband! the word then had some sense beyond that of the chief partner in a social enterprise? There was something in it that forced the wife into oneness of feeling with that one man and no other. Why? Claire could not have explained; but she suddenly thought of her child, and felt that no unpleasantness could disturb her son's father without forcing her to vibrate to its touch.

In the child alone lies the unity between man and wife in France.

CHAPTER XVI.

Monsieur Mardonnet.

EDUCATE a man as you will in France, keep him to his books, make inquisitors of his teachers, lock up his heart and soul, and if you do not find means to lock up his body, he will make strange acquaintances. And so it had been with the Marquis de Beauvoisin; and in this way he had come to know M. Mardonnet.

At the small town of Malleray, which was the post-town of the Château de Beauvoisin, M. Mardonnet, the father, had been post-master for nearly thirty years, and was once a highly popular and very useful man. He had been appointed to his post under Louis Philippe, had preserved it through the Republic, and occupied it still, at the opening of this tale. Both father and son, though from different points of view, went over in 1851 to the paternal despotism of My Uncle's Nephew, and voted enthusiastically for the Empire. When it was done, the amusing part of the business was that neither of the two could comprehend why the other had done it, each holding a diametrically contrary opinion upon the benefits that were to accrue to France from the establishment of Imperial Power. Mardonnet the father insisted upon it, that order would be for evermore maintained, that a wholesome authority

would keep down the press, and that a period would be brought about in which nothing more would have to be feared from that so-called intelligence which had long raged rampant in France, and brought her to the verge of ruin. Mardonnet the son affirmed that socialism would be the watch-word of the second empire, that the people were going to rule, that all those who were anything, or had anything, would go to the wall and be crushed by the masses, which, he said, meant those who had nothing, and were nothing. He represented the Emperor as a socialist, a Freemason, and a free thinker, and quoted texts by the hour from the Emperor's own writings in proof of his assertions; and when it was rumoured that he wrote in a newspaper devoted to the propagation of atheistical doctrines, he did not deny it. This it was which, as we shall see by-and-by, first brought M. Théophile into the sphere wherein moved the faultlessly educated son of the Dowager de Beauvoisin.

Olivier de Beauvoisin rejoiced in a tutor whom his mother had chosen for him as particularly safe. This was a certain Abbé Lannion, not a bad man by any means, but rather zealous than wise, and deeming everything allowable that was undertaken for the glory of the church. Now it was borne in upon the worthy Abbé's mind that he must convert Théophile Mardonnet, and to this work of conversion he accordingly set: secretly, but with tooth and nail. The Dowager was, as we know, a sharp woman; but she reposed such implicit confidence in the Abbé Lannion that,

where he was concerned, her sharpness deliberately slumbered, and so long as his pupil was with him, she inquired no further. In pursuance of his idea, carried away by it, and imbued with the genuine Jesuitical theory that the means justify the end, the Abbé Lannion contrived to effect a meeting, to all appearance perfectly casual, with Théophile Mardonnet; and displaying a large amount of cleverness in a small way, he managed to prosecute what he imagined to be his great work, entirely to his own satisfaction, never once perceiving the game that his adversary was playing with him. The upshot of the whole was that the devil was the winner, there where the church was to have reaped such evident gains. Théophile Mardonnet was too well endowed with that species of coarse cleverness, for which men of his stamp are so remarkable in France, not to see that, while the hope of converting him was the bait which drew the unlucky Abbé Lannion into his net, his—Théophile Mardonnet's—own interest pointed to the young Marquis as to a natural piece of prey.

Mardonnet was turned thirty; Olivier was not yet nineteen; and it was by a rapid and summary process that Théophile Mardonnet arrived at the conclusion that the young Marquis de Beauvoisin was put upon this earth to become his natural prey. He just placed in juxtaposition in his mind's eye a few leading facts, asked himself a few necessary questions, and was satisfied. Olivier was a minor, and enjoyed an allowance, for every centime of which he had to account to

his mother—(a tough party the Dowager, and not to be meddled with!) Olivier, at his majority, would enjoy something like three hundred thousand francs a year (£12,000 English—a large fortune in France). Olivier was a fool—a blockhead, rather. That was M. Théophile's way of putting it.

And then he asked himself these questions:—Had Olivier any principle? No. Had he any amusements? No. Did he want any? No. Was he perfectly healthy and vigorous? Yes. Was he content with his vegetable life? Yes. Was that because he knew no better? Yes. Well, then, he must be made to know better, that was all. And to this task of mental improvement Théophile Mardonnet set himself with the whole power and volition of his coarse nature, and that was a good deal, and he succeeded beyond what he had ventured to anticipate.

A very few fragments of conversation with Olivier (brought about in the back parlour of the post office) sufficed to show to M. Théophile what was the calibre of the lad's mind; and it was but too easy for him to fashion the raw material of which he found himself suddenly possessed. He began by lending him books and plays to read, which the boy concealed with admirable dexterity, devoured till he knew whole pages of them by heart, and returned, without any one around him being one bit the wiser. This of itself was promising; and though the youth's nature was not a passionate, it might, as the wily preceptor thought, be made a vicious one. Opportunities were promptly

created by Théophile Mardonnet, for the prize he had secured seemed to him worth taking any amount of trouble about; and so he played the game of sanctity freely into the Abbé's hands, and the latter was soon convinced that he had had a direct inspiration from above when he undertook to convert the postmaster's son.

To say the real truth, the Abbé Lannion was at last disposed to regard Monsieur Théophile as a fit subject for the heartfelt compassion of saints, and himself as a sort of earthly manifestation of the Divine light which turns Sauls into Pauls. M. Théophile stuck at nothing, and did write now and then an article for the *Portier du Paradis* (a journal founded expressly to defend St Peter, and which was as wrathful as the *Syllabus* itself against all christians in general who were not its subscribers); and he confided in private to his ecclesiastical friend that he had cured himself of toothache by an application of the water of *La Salette*!

"But," said he, "I am a ruined man if any living being guess at these facts—for my daily bread is earned in the camp of the infidels—and if it should be known that grace has touched me, I must die of starvation, and be calumniated, probably, on both sides into the bargain."

M. Théophile's spiritual effusions, therefore, were signed by a fictitious name—which was contrary to law; but, as the *Portier du Paradis* was not read by a hundred persons, no alarm was felt as to prosecution;

and if any danger had threatened, the Abbé Lannion would have declared himself the real author, rather than allow his convert to suffer for having come back to the right path. It was agreed that, on the return of the family to Paris for the winter, the Abbé should use all his influence in the ultramontane press to obtain for Monsieur Théophile a lucrative post upon the staff of some right-thinking paper, in whose columns, as from a tribune, the reclaimed sinner might flagellate with all his new-born fervour his old associates in impiety.

"Then!" said M. Théophile, "I can be at liberty to cast in the teeth of the infidels the ill-gotten gold by which, until then, I must subsist!"

"Then!" exclaimed the exultant Abbé Lannion, "I can boldly triumph in my work, show my fellow labourers in the fields of faith what I have done, and reveal all to Madame la Marquise! How Madame la Marquise will rejoice over you!" he invariably added, as though in that notion lay his chiefest satisfaction.

Winter came on. It was quite the beginning of the year, and one day M. Théophile was sitting in his small room on the fourth floor in the Rue St. Anne, building up his fire with all the stray bits of wood he could pick up with his tongs, and ruminating in his conscience what might be his probable resources for the next six months. It was between three and four o'clock. A ring came at the door-bell—not a loud one. "Some confounded creditor," thought Mardonnet. His housekeeper, the shuffling, snuff-taking old woman

who did for him from eight o'clock till two, was gone, and he was alone. A second ring came at the door-bell, but rather louder. Mardonnet got up, hesitated, looked bothered, reflected that creditors came mostly in the earlier part of the day, and made up his mind to open. When he had done so, his whole aspect changed. A wide gleam of contentment lighted up his vulgar countenance, and exclaiming,—

“Monsieur le Marquis! What an honour you do me!” He retraced his steps, bowing profoundly, and ushering M. de Beauvoisin into his sitting-room, redolent with the fumes of tobacco. Olivier held out his hand, seated himself in the one tolerably comfortable arm-chair, and Mardonnet bravely sacrificed a whole log of wood to make the fire brighter.

“I resolved I would pay you a visit,” commenced the Marquis, graciously; “but, as you know, it is not so easy to manage. There are but two days in the week where, by a combination, it can be done; but I made the combination, and I have managed it very well. I am supposed to be at the fencing school,” he added, with a look of great superiority. “I go there alone—I mean without the Abbé. Roger de Damville, and Adrien de Villecour, and I, we take our lesson on Tuesdays and Saturdays together; and Roger’s ill in bed with typhus fever, so Adrien and I are alone; besides which my mother is at home all day on a Tuesday—she receives—so I was quite safe, for I can trust Adrien to any amount.”

Olivier was embarrassed, and spoke volubly, and

more than was his wont; and Théophile noted all these small signs as he sat watching his visitor, with his plump hands crossed upon his plump chest.

"I'm sincerely touched by your remembrance of me, I'm sure," murmured Mardonnet; "but at your age the feelings are warm, and it really is very kind of you to mount up my four pair of stairs, and to contrive to escape, too, from the thralls in which you are held; for," (here M. Théophile gave a cautious expression to his voice) "you are certainly tightly held. Of course, I would not venture to criticise any system adopted by so superior a person as Madame la Marquise; but still the fact is certain, you are tightly held," propounded Mardonnet.

"Very," responded the young Marquis; "but you see what makes it bearable is, that it is the same for all. Now there are, as I said, Roger and Adrien, and a heap more I could mention, they're all brought up just in the same way."

"And they all of them manage to elude a little the yoke that is put upon their necks?" suggested mildly M. Théophile, with a half interrogative tone.

"Well, just a little," replied Olivier, "now and then, and just to have a sort of feeling of being free for an hour or two. There's no great harm in that, after all."

"Harm!" echoed his plump friend; "certainly not. There will never be any harm in anything you do," he added, calming the timid conscience of the boy.

There was a pause, during which Olivier accepted

a cigar; smoking, as he related, being permitted by the Dowager, and the Abbé declaring it a most innocent occupation. (I have told you the Abbé was, in his own opinion, a man who went with his times.)

"I have brought back the book you lent me just before we left the country," observed Olivier, taking out of his pocket a small yellow-bound volume, that he would have been far the better for never having read.

"Did you find it amusing?" asked M. Théophile.

"Tremendously!" answered Olivier; "delightful! I lent it to Adrien, and to Gaston de Vivienne; that's why I've kept it so long. And—" here he paused, and looking straight into the fire, puffed a huge puff of smoke from his lips.

"And you would like to have another of the same sort, perhaps?" hinted, blandly, M. Mardonnet.

"N—o, n—o," stammered the Marquis; "but there certainly is something we should all three of us like very much."

His voice sank to a whisper as he uttered these words, and he drew his chair nearer to M. Théophile.

"Anything I can do?" inquired that wily individual.

"Oh, yes; something you can easily, easily do," rejoined Olivier, with, for him, considerable eagerness. But there he came to a standstill, and could get no further.

"You know my utter devotion to you," said Mar-

donnet, trying to bring on the confession he had long foreseen. "Anything I can, I will do for you."

"Can you take us behind the scenes of the Porte St. Martin?" blustered out the youth with desperation.

"Mercy!" cried M. Théophile; "what a request!"

"Is it impossible?" pursued the Marquis, hurriedly, and now that the ice was once broken, plunging into the stream up to the very neck; "is it so very difficult? We want to go all three—Adrien, and Gaston, and I, and on some night when they give the *Biche aux Bois*. Nobody will ever know; we three shall keep the secret—you may count on us: but can you do it?"

"There is no difficulty for me," said M. Théophile, self-sufficiently; "but, really, the notion is quite an adventurous one. Oh, youth, youth! you know not what you seek for!"

"We want to see Mlle. Camille Leblond," continued Olivier, whom nothing seemed now capable of stopping on the path of sublunary dissipation.

"Whew! no less than that, young gentlemen!" and M. Théophile pursed up his lips, and rounded his eyes, and looked the picture of astonishment. "Mlle. Camille Leblond!" he repeated; "but that costs money. Your allowances are scanty, and have to be accounted for, every farthing of them!"

"Well, we could go shares," suggested Olivier. "To begin with, we could get you to buy us a splendid bouquet for her—each of us could give ten francs. A bouquet of thirty francs!" urged Olivier, thinking what

lavish expenditure that was. "A bouquet of thirty francs! we could manage that between us, each giving ten francs. I could account for it at the end of the month by buying a box of bonbons of five francs for Aunt d'Hérincourt, and putting it down fifteen."

Alas! Théophile Mardonnet had a lengthy explanation to give upon the financial combinations that would be requisite in case he introduced these lawless young gentlemen to one of the reigning stars of that period; but Olivier's mind seemed made up, and the more objections were made, the less he listened to them.

He agreed to everything. The plan involved a secret egress from the Hôtel de Beauvoisin after every one was asleep at night, and a secret ingress to it before anyone was awake in the morning, besides numberless other dangers; but no excuse was accepted, and Mardonnet was forced to admit that, with plenty of money, this, like most other things in the world, was possible. But plenty of money! how was that to be got?

"Well," insinuated M. Théophile, "if it were positively necessary, I could get that, too."

The reader hardly needs to be told that Théophile Mardonnet had hooked his fish.

Mademoiselle Camille Leblond did all that was left to do.

This episode occurred, as has been stated, six or seven years previous to Olivier's marriage with Claire. He was then a boy of nineteen, and Théophile Mardonnet was a man turned thirty.

CHAPTER XVII.

Mademoiselle Aspasia.

ON Easter Tuesday, the day but one after we have seen Olivier de Beauvoisin and his wife going to high mass at their parish church, the fat, vulgar man, whom Claire had been so surprised to see accost her husband in the public street, was walking along one of the side-alleys of the park at Versailles; one of the unfrequented ones, leading obliquely from the Tapis Vert to the Jardin du Roi. He was not alone; a remarkably well-dressed woman was walking by his side, attired in black silk not over bespangled with jet-beads, and through the meshes of whose spotted veil came the flashes of two brilliantly black eyes. The face was a well-favoured, though not an agreeable one, and its expression, as far as it could be made out, seemed more sharp even than bold.

"We can sit down here; we are quite out of the way of any Easter excursionists," said this person, in whose harsh voice is revealed to us our friend, Mademoiselle Aspasia de Mourjonville. The man who was thus addressed obeyed, and the couple sat down upon a bench in the middle of the unpeopled avenue.

"Well! and how did my worshipful sister accept the notion of being torn away from all her barbaric

admirers?" asked she of the speckled veil, as soon as she had settled her skirts to her satisfaction.

"Accept?" repeated her companion, "why, I thought I had explained to you that she was the first to pine and sicken to come back——"

"What do you mean, Théophile?" interrupted Mademoiselle Aspasia, with extreme surprise. "Why, she will get no boyards here! she's terribly faded now, the lovely Camille!"

"No boyards, no!" echoed the fat man with a grunt; "but she gets the Boulevards, and so do I!"

"So there's patriotism in your return, is there?" observed Mademoiselle Mourjon, otherwise de Mourjonville, with a sneer. "Well! of a certainty that is about the very last luxury in which I should have thought either of you two would have indulged!" and the sneer was biting in both the look and the tone.

"Ah! but you don't know what it is to a Parisian to think that he's going to make his home, his living and dying place, of a barbarous country where they only speak make-believe French, and where there's nothing one's ever been used to; neither minor theatres, nor newspapers, nor talk! neither a real café (like these here), nor the Boulevards, nor a *pot-au-feu*!" and Théophile Mardonnet positively did look as though he had been suffering martyrdom, as though St. Peter had emptied the phials of his utmost wrath upon his head, for not having more seriously taken up his cause some years before in the columns of the *Portier du Paradis*.

Mademoiselle de Mourjonville tightened her well-

fitting tight glove over her long thin hand, and looked an odd kind of look at her neighbour.

"I think if I had had Camille's position," remarked she, "I could have renounced the delights of this enchanting paradise."

"No! you couldn't!" opposed, energetically, Mardonnet. "You couldn't in the long run."

"Not for lots of money?" asked Mademoiselle Aspasia.

"Not for anything under the sun," affirmed her interlocutor; "besides, though money is easy to gain out there, it is easy to spend, too; everything is horribly dear."

"They play, don't they?" said Aspasia, curiously.

"Yes! they play day and night, and what's more, they pay nine times out of ten, especially when the money's owed to a foreigner; but it's all no use! two hundred a year in Paris is better than two thousand a year in Moldo-Wallachia. Pah! what a den for a man of education to live in!" and Mardonnet shuddered as only a Frenchman can shudder when in a moment of severe hunger, for instance, he has the choice given him between starvation and some outlandish dish, wherein eels and lemon-juice, cream, apples, and beer, combine together!

Mademoiselle Mourjon seemed to be reflecting upon something, and, after a pause,—

"Yes," said she, echoing Mardonnet's last words; "a man of education, forsooth: there's the rub! That's what you think yourself."

"Aspasie!" exclaimed her stout companion, with such an explosion of offended dignity; but she cut that short by a quiet laugh, beneath the sound of which he utterly collapsed.

"Pray does the lovely Camille still honour me with the same jealousy as heretofore?" she continued.

"I hardly know. I think it safest never to mention your name."

"Bravo! a piece of admirable prudence; and what I think decidedly safest and best, in the present state of affairs. But, Théophile, in the name of all worldly wisdom, what could have induced you to go and pounce straight upon the Marquis, as you tell me you did? And in the public street, too! before the pick of society!" and Mlle. Aspasie indulged in another sneer of incomparable bitterness.

"What would you?" rejoined Théophile, with an exculpatory shrug; "I couldn't help myself. I was just fresh home, and, when I caught sight of him, it actually seemed to remind me of old times, and I went straight up to him before I knew what I was about."

"Old times!" said Mlle. Aspasie, mockingly; "nice old times to remember, indeed!"

"Nobody noticed anything," objected Mardonnet; "he moved away before anybody saw me accost him."

"Well, but he?" retorted Aspasie. "Do you suppose he will have been particularly rejoiced to realise the fact of your return to France?"

"An impulse! one can't control one's impulses."

Besides," he added, "the Marquis is his own master now, and——"

His companion cut him short.

"He's very little more his own master than he ever was," she observed. "His wife's at the head of his house, and his mother's at the head of him. He don't care for being master over anything, not even his stables."

"Not even his heart?" inquired Théophile Mar-donnet, with a smile.

"Hasn't got any," rejoined the lady. "Heart indeed! well, to be sure, a pretty thing you have hit upon! Heart? Why, where do you suppose that should come from?"

"Well, it is a fact that you sometimes find it in the very worst men," opined M. Théophile, as though to excuse his want of knowledge of human nature.

"In the very worst?" echoed Mlle. Aspasia; "I should think so. But M. le Marquis de Beauvoisin is as far from the very worst as from the very best. He's simply nothing at all decidedly; scarcely even half and half. But so they are all—all those of his kind. He's fonder than I am of finery; likes fine things and fine people; and judges women as a woman does, upon their dress. He's bored with everything; and might, perhaps, be moved to sacrifice whatever he possesses upon earth if he could be delivered from his own wearisome self. There's not a passion in him

yet. I suppose vice will get hold of him later; vice requires no energy."

"Yes," said Mardonnet; "I thought it had done so already; but he slipped back under his mother's wing as easily after he had tasted of the forbidden fruit as before."

"By which the devil loses nothing," remarked, parenthetically, the well-dressed young person in black. "But let me tell you, Théophile, I would advise you not to come within sight of the Dowager; for, if you do, depend upon it, you will very shortly find yourself exiled again from your beloved Boulevards, and inducted into some lucrative but compulsory employment at three thousand miles' distance from your ardently-adored fatherland."

"I am not afraid of the Dowager," replied, quietly, M. Théophile.

"Aren't you?" retorted Mlle. Aspasia, with a curious glance. "Then it's because you don't know her sufficiently."

"No, it's not that," answered Mardonnet, with a significant shake of the head. "I do know her better than most people, and a good deal better than she knows me, for instance; but I've that on hand which prevents my being afraid of the Dowager."

"Théophile!" cried, suddenly, Mlle. Mourjon, turning round and facing her stout friend; "you don't mean to say that you're in league with her, do you, about Claudine?"

"What!" exclaimed he, with a start; "in league,

did you say? I in league with the Marquise? I! Well, that would be a strange event, after what is past; and about Claudine? Why, what on earth do you mean?"

"What I mean is this," stated the fair Aspasia, deliberately; and, at the same time, following with great attention the pattern she was drawing upon the gravel with the tip of her boot. "What I mean is, that that woman is capable of anything in order to detach her brother from Claudine—in order to make him cast her off. She would enter into a compact with anyone: with Mazzini or Renari, or Georges Sand, or M. Duruy, or Satan himself, or a chimney-sweeper, or you, if she thought she could achieve that end. So it struck me that perhaps——"

"No, indeed," interrupted Mardonnet; "nothing in that way. I have had no communication, direct or indirect, with the Dowager, nor do I need to have any. The Marquis is legally his own master now, whatever he may be morally; so that his despot of a mother does not come into play; nor," he pursued, after a pause, "does he himself, for that matter. I don't fancy he will court me. I have no particular desire to court him; the pavement of Paris is broad enough for us both, without our being jostled up against each other, and my line is not his line."

"And pray, may I ask, what is your line to be?" demanded Mlle. de Mourjonville, somewhat disdainfully.

"Politics," propounded Mardonnet; and as he ut-

tered the word, he seemed to swell inwardly. Mlle. Aspasia drew herself up, raised her eyebrows to their utmost arch, surveyed her companion all over, and, in a tone not complimentary, certainly, repeated the word,—

“Politics?”

“Well, and why not?” asked, hastily, M. Théophile. “Are not politics now the field in which every man of any capacity can exercise his talents?”

“No,” put in Aspasia.

“Look at the ministers who govern us,” went on Mardonnet, unheeding her negation; “who among them has sprung from a higher source?”

“Oh!” laughed she, “if you go to such heights as those, I withdraw my opposition. We may, for aught I know, see you one day minister of commerce, or agriculture, or justice even, or prefect of police; that would be the best of all. Well, I at once register my claim to a *bureau de tabac* in Paris! Mind, in Paris, in a central situation, whenever you become an Excellency.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, Aspasia.”

“I never did, and you know it,” said she, with biting sharpness.

“Well,” responded Mardonnet, meekly, “I don’t mean that; but my chances are so capital that I should be a fool to throw them away. You know who is made sub-prefect at Malleray.”

“Not I. Who?”

"Well, Marius Daudel, the greatest friend I ever had—"

"What; the man who was for founding that paper to be entitled the *Red Flag*, and who was nearly condemned for swindling?" inquired Aspasia. "Mind, I'm not raising an objection—nothing astonishes me—I'm only seeking for information."

"Yes, the same man," answered Théophile. "He is in tremendous favour at the Ministry of——, and is now sub-prefect of Malleray. This it is in reality, which (besides home-sickness) brought me home. I wrote to Marius the moment I knew of his nomination, and told him of my intention to return. He has nothing to refuse me."

"Oh, I dare say not."

"Added to which," continued Mardonnet, "you know the Minister of——is my mother's first cousin; so, as I said, I have the best chances."

"Of what?" inquired, calmly, Mlle. Mourjon.

"Of being made a deputy at the next elections."

"For what locality, may I ask?"

"For the department of Savre-et-Merle."

"Are you mad, Théophile?" cried Aspasia, jumping from her seat, and standing in front of that individual, and looking him all over with a sort of mixture of contempt and dismay. "Are you mad? For Savre-et-Merle? What, the Marquise's own department? the department for which she will infallibly one day put up her son, and in which she reigns supreme?"

"The department whereof Malleray is one of the

three head-quarters, and where the Minister of——will move heaven and earth for his cousin's son," rejoined Mardonnet.

"How do you know that? The Beauvoisins can do anything they like there, and the Marquis will crush you."

"The Beauvoisins will not succeed in Savre-et-Merle," remarked M. Théophile, "because they're too clerical. There will be two elections in the two nearest departments that will go to the fanatics and be ultramontane pure—a third would be too much. I shall come in as a free-thinker—a Republican, if you will; but a Republican who loves dictators, and the rights of thought, and all that sort of thing. I am sure of my election, and the Marquis will not crush me."

"He will, you'll see."

"You'll see he won't," retorted M. Théophile, "for he won't attempt to oppose me."

"There's no saying what he may do; he may go in for being what they call a Liberal. That man, Dupont de Laporte, may make him do something nobody expects."

Mardonnet again shook his head. "He will not oppose me, take my word for it," he reiterated, as he offered his arm to his companion, to continue their walk.

After a few steps taken in silence, Mademoiselle de Mourjonville came to a stand, and looked her stout friend through and through.

"Théophile," said she; "you fancy the Marquis will not oppose you?" and after a pause of a second,—"then there was more happened seven years ago than I knew of; I should like to know what."

As this worthy pair moved on, M. Théophile might be seen bending down to touch with his thick lips the hand that rested on his arm, while the said thick lips murmured, "You always did with me whatever you chose, Aspasia!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Dowager.

OUR friend, Mademoiselle de Mourjonville, was thoroughly in the right when she said that the Dowager de Beauvoisin was capable of anything in order to detach her brother from the Sphinx. She had already done something very abnormal when she not only permitted, but in fact advised, her son to enter into his uncle's intimacy, and consequently to accept in a certain degree, the hospitality of a person doing the honours of the Hôtel de Moranges, in a position so utterly unavowable as that of Claudine.

There was no show in the Hôtel de Moranges, but there was no end to the expenses over which the severest taste invariably presided. The familiars of the place were wont to point to a small ebony table with four straight legs, for which M. de Moranges had paid exactly double the price given by a famous Brazilian millionaire for a great big flaunting table encrusted with precious stones. And this was the rule observed in all things. From the moment that the Marquis put himself at the head of a house, and openly entertained the masculine portion of society, he resolved that no one should be able to say that he had seen the magnificence of the entertainment surpassed. If, at the sale

of some noted gallery there was some one particular picture for which governments (let alone Lord Hertford) were likely to bid extravagantly high, that picture was certain to be bought by M. de Moranges; and if a thousand pounds could purchase a matchless saddle-horse, or if four thousand were needed to secure four incomparable, and all but identical carriage-horses, the sum would be given instantly, the team driven by the owner, but no fuss made about it. All this leads, as the Dowager well knew, to a perilous state of things, as far as regards finances; and the fortune, which she had determined should descend unimpaired to her grandson, seemed in a likely way to be, sooner or later, swallowed up by unavoidable ruin.

Madame de Beauvoisin saw no escape, save in the possibility of detaching her brother from the Sphinx. But how was this to be managed? The first necessity was, as we have said, to be thoroughly well informed as to the minutest details of daily life at the Hôtel de Moranges. But the information given to her by Olivier, after she had gone the length of advising him to cultivate his uncle's society in the interior presided over by Claudine, was unsatisfactory in the extreme. It plainly resulted from all Olivier's reports that the interior of the Hôtel de Moranges was, except for its splendour, the quietest, most uneventful, and, indeed, most austere that could be imagined—a pattern to be imitated by the most unexceptionable families. She was not a bit the wiser for anything told to her by Olivier; and, indeed, at the end of a very short time,

Olivier ceased telling her anything at all. There was, on the surface, nothing to tell; we may ask, was there nothing beneath? but the Dowager did not do so; and she was at her wit's end, and did not know whom to apply to for aid.

"Is that woman attached to him?" she inquired one day of Count Dupont de Laporte.

"She doesn't know," replied Dupont, with a smile; "and therefore I am somewhat troubled to decide."

"You don't, for a moment, fancy that he is attached to her, do you?" demanded, sharply, the Dowager.

Count Dupont fixed a meaning glance full upon the questioner, and said,—

"Madame la Marquise, this lies more in your domain than in mine: have you ever had cause to suppose that M. de Moranges could attach himself to any one?"

"Hitherto, certainly not," was the answer; "but he lavishes proofs of what people call affection upon her, does he not?"

"None that I have seen—as yet," responded Henri; "he lavishes proofs of affection upon himself, whereof she is the mere sign."

"But he'll be ruined in a couple of years," suggested the Dowager.

"He's more likely to be insane in half that time."

"Insane!" she echoed: "what should give you such a preposterous notion? Maurice insane, indeed!"

"Do you suppose, Madame la Marquise," rejoined, ironically, Count Dupont, "that the fact of being the

heir of all the Moranges since Clovis is any guarantee against such an infliction? What gives me this preposterous notion, as you style it, is experience, and some slight knowledge of physiology."

"Physiology! Pah!" sneered the Dowager, turning up her nose.

Henri Dupont bowed.

"May be," observed he, coolly; "but physiology has its usefulness all the same."

"Is it true about the Russian diamond?" asked the Dowager.

"Perfectly true; he paid it, five hundred thousand francs down, and Claudine has worn it at nearly every dinner I have been invited to at your brother's house. She mostly wears it on a plain black velvet dress, or on a white velvet one, which is another of his whims. It is mounted so as to show no mounting, and looks like a star dropped down from the sky. Poor Claudine," added Dupont; "she can't understand that simplicity, it makes her uncomfortable. She would like her big diamond much better if it were a paste one set round with a thick gold rim and lots of coloured stones."

"What is the woman who goes about with her?" demanded the Dowager.

Count Dupont de Laporte's countenance underwent a change. "Oh! that is quite another thing," said he, seriously. "Aspasie Mourjon, called Mademoiselle Aspasie de Mourjonville, is altogether another sort of person. She patronizes me hugely, and I sometimes stare in astonishment at the native intelligence of the

woman. If M. de Moranges had put her in Claudine's place, I should tremble—tremble for your party, Madame la Marquise, for, I believe, he would be a great statesman yet, and govern France—that woman is first-rate."

"And corrupt, of course?"

"That depends on the sense lent to the word: in the ordinary sense no, for she is wholly passionless—but she is full of perversity——"

"And would do anything for money," interrupted the Marquise.

"Well," and he hesitated; "I fancy she would do almost anything for money—but more for ambition; she's a curious compound, and amuses me immensely; but take my word for it, she is no every day woman."

"Ah!" the Marquise did lay down her knitting on her knee this time, drawled out her exclamation lengthily, and kept her eyes fixed on Count Dupont with so intense a gaze that they seemed to look through him, and go far far away into some distant speculative thought.

Count Dupont took out his watch and rose from his seat. "I must make haste," said he; "I am past the time I settled to meet a man at the club. I have the honour to present my homage to you, Madame la Marquise," and he advanced towards the Dowager, and offered her his hand.

"Tell me, what was that wonderful fête Maurice gave last week at St. Germain?" she inquired, still holding Henri Dupont's hand.

"Oh! something positively Sardanapalian," replied he; "a banquet in a pavilion built up on purpose in the forest, a torchlight procession, fireworks, special trains, heaven only knows what all! it must have cost him forty or fifty thousand francs or more, for there was a theatre, with the orchestra of the Conservatoire, and scenes sung by Faure and the Nilsson."

"How abominable! what was the object of it all?" exclaimed the angry Dowager.

"To show a Hungarian Count of his acquaintance, just arrived from Pesth, what a French gentleman can do when he sets about it; but Olivier can tell you more of the details of that than I can, for he had to play the attentive the whole time to Claudine, Moranges being devoted to his Hungarian guest. I took charge of my friend Aspasia Mourjon, and do not in the least complain of my lot—ask Olivier, he will tell you all, I must go."

And, so saying, he departed, leaving the Dowager dissatisfied with Olivier for not having told her what it seemed there had been to tell.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Deputation.

A VERY few days after her conversation with Count Dupont de Laporte, the Dowager received a letter which caused her to send to her brother in all haste. He was out; and, towards seven o'clock, the answer brought was, that he would come to her as soon as he was free after dinner.

It was in a boudoir which, under any other woman's hands would have been cosy, but which, under her treatment, was unhomely, that the Marquise awaited her brother that evening. It was a most methodically arranged apartment, in which nothing was out of its place, nor looked as if it ever, at any period of time, could have been so. The tables all stood square, and the chairs stood stiff, as though waiting for occupants who were coming to sign some deed.

There were no flowers, and no nick-nacks, nothing betraying a female presence; above all, none of that sweet subtle perfume which—no matter what her age—seems the natural emanation of a womanly-woman's whereabouts;—the soul, as it were, of all the combined prettinesses surrounding her. There was a lamp upon a table in the middle of the room, and the Dowager sat under its rays, with her perpetual white wool

knitting work; and the shaded light did not soften the hard outlines of her face, or the hard glance of her eyes, or the hard lustre of her coal-black hair.

The Marquise looked thoughtful; and, from time to time, suspended her work and bit the tip of her ivory knitting-needle. At about a quarter to ten the Marquis de Moranges entered.

"Bring the tea," said the Dowager; and, before she had concluded the greetings exchanged with her brother, two silent men, one in black, the other in livery, served tea in Sèvres cups, on silver trays, with all its usual accessories. The Marquise had never in all her life made tea. She took it, as she did many things which womanly-women fashion after their own image, ready made.

When this social ceremony was ended, and the door closed on all interruption,—

"*Cher ami*," said the Dowager, very blandly, "I have sent for you upon a really important matter. I would not have troubled you otherwise."

"I am entirely at your orders," replied the Marquis, with prompt politeness. "What has happened?"

"That man, Carpentier, has had an apoplectic fit. There's Durochard's letter."

And she put out her hand to take an envelope lying under her white wool upon the table.

"What, Léon Carpentier, our deputy?"

"Yes."

"Is he dead?" inquired M. de Moranges.

"No; he's better. You will see what Durochard writes about."

"Why, what age was he?" continued the Marquis, following out an idea of his own, without reading the letter. "I don't believe he was much past fifty."

"He was under fifty," responded the Dowager; "but that doesn't matter." (Perhaps M. de Moranges thought it did). "What does matter is, that this is a warning—fits of this kind always are—and that Carpentier's days are evidently numbered; and, that being the case, we must be prepared."

The Marquis smiled.

"You always are so, my dear sister," said he. "I never knew you unprepared for anything yet. Of course you allude to the Deputation?"

"Naturally," was the reply; "and that was why I was in such a hurry to see you. We have not an hour to lose. I want to write to Durochard by to-morrow's post, for, unless I can positively rely upon your entire support, the contest would be too difficult; may I do so?"

"I wish to goodness you were a man, Adèle!" exclaimed the Marquis; "it would be a pleasure to help you—you would make a capital Deputy, and, what's more, you would somehow or other be sure of being nominated one, whereas Olivier——"

"Olivier will be quite certain if you take the thing up actively."

"Actively?" echoed M. de Moranges; "that's more

easily said than done. But who do you suppose will contest the election with you?" inquired the Marquis.

"First," she remarked, "there is M. de Laprunaye, in our district, he is by way of being a clever man and moderate, and goes in for agriculture. I think we can manage him; then there's Achille Bouvier, the attorney's son at Combeville, he is a serious antagonist, one of those rabid demagogues whom the government delights in bringing over to its service, an atheist, and with all the free-thinkers at his back: well, I don't yet see what is to be done with him; he's very strong at Combeville, and he's got some supporters at Malleray, besides a good many in Brunoy."

"What, in my district?" cried the Marquis.

"Yes, never mind that, it's not against Bouvier that I need your help. But there's another candidate. The Duc de Vivienne will, I believe, bring Gaston forward."

"His nephew?"

"Yes; and the plan, I fancy, is, to marry Gaston to his cousin Herminie, and so unite in one the two enormous fortunes of the two mothers."

"True," murmured the Marquis, rubbing his chin with his hand and pulling down his nether lip between his finger and thumb. "Bless my soul!" continued he; "why that would give Gaston one day two millions a-year—that's enormous!"

"Yes; and add to that the Deputation," observed the Dowager, leaning forwards towards her brother; "and what would become of us?"

There was a pause of a few seconds, during which the brother and sister looked at each other; at last said the Marquise, cautiously:

"But it will require a great deal of money."

"These things always do," propounded M. de Moranges; "but, luckily, Olivier has loads of money to spare, thanks to your admirable administration during his minority. But then, on what line of policy would you bring him in, my dear sister? As the Government candidate?"

"God forbid!" and the Dowager started upon her chair.

"But then, as what? As a Royalist devoted to the past?"

"As an honest man, and a Christian devoted to religion—and order!" said Madame de Beauvoisin, with dignified gravity.

"Ah! yes, I know! order!—that means the Throne and the Altar in a new dress: my dear Adèle," added the Marquis, "the Vivienues can play at that game better than you."

"But if you fall off from them, Maurice, they can play no game at all; they count on you, and on the Bishop, and if you resolutely stand by Olivier I will detach Monseigneur."

"So, it will be a war of uncles," remarked he; "Moranges *versus* Vivienne! a fresh Provincial feud—as though there were not enough such already in our distracted party, as we still persist in denominating it——"

"At all events that's preferable to letting the Viennese rule over us all, throughout the whole Department, as they will do if once they get hold of a seat in the Chamber."

"Well!" objected M. de Moranges, "they say Gaston is a clever fellow."

"That's only because he talks more than other young men, and lays down the law on what are called serious subjects—he's a 'young dogmatique,' as Montalembert calls them."

"What will Olivier do in the Corps Législatif?" demanded his uncle.

"Just what the vast majority does—nothing," responded his mother. "But you see, yourself, that if we are not elected, our influence in Savre-et-Merle is lost for ever; Olivier is the only one who can represent us—unless, indeed, my dear brother, unless you——"

"I!" exclaimed Moranges, with a tone and gesture of downright horror,—“I! why, I would sooner be hung!”

His sister smiled.

"So I thought," said she, with a smile.

There was again a pause.

"Then I may count upon you, Maurice; and I can write at once to Durochard?" said the Dowager.

"Certainly," answered her brother; "what must be, must be: but I warn you beforehand that this contest will cost Olivier more than you fancy."

The Marquise gave a look to M. de Moranges that

was meant to be engaging, and suggestive of a great deal.

"Well," continued she, "it is, as you say, a war of uncles; the Duc de Vivienne will probably help Gaston largely, in a financial point of view."

"Luckily my nephew does not need that proof of affection on my part," retorted the Marquis, "for I could not give it him. I have plenty to do with my fortune without touching politics (which I hate); and luckily, also, Olivier is twice as rich as I am."

When M. de Moranges took leave of his sister, the latter watched, with a sharp gaze, his retreating figure, and continued afterwards to watch the door by which he had made his exit.

"No money!" whispered she to herself, as she carefully rolled up her white wools, and put everything connected with her work in its proper place. "No money! No! he will never be to be counted upon for one hour, or for one sou, so long as that woman remains there."

Madame de Beauvoisin had arrived at that moral crossing where two roads intersect each other, one pointing to what strictly ought, the other, to what possibly might be.

CHAPTER XX.

Two Powers.

WHEN people wish for anything very much, they invariably begin by setting limits to what they would do to obtain their wish, and they almost always end by, in fact, doing something they regarded as positively blameable, nay impossible.

Now, day by day, the longing of the Dowager to separate her brother from the Sphinx was growing stronger, and found less readily any means of satisfaction. But then what Henri Dupont de Laporte had said of Aspasia Mourjon recurred to her, and she thought what a vexatious thing it was that she could not be in communication with this person, and what an excellent thing it would be if she were so, and she pondered over the whole situation, and soon got to ask herself why it was so utterly impossible that she, the Dowager Marquise de Beauvoisin *née* Moranges, should, for a potent interest, hold converse with Mlle. Aspasia de Mourjonville? Extraordinary things were done every day, and—when they succeeded—no one objected to them; besides, surely secrecy could be secured, surely she, the Dowager, had means at her disposal of binding over the intelligent Aspasia to her service; surely she could at a moderate cost ensure the co-operation of this most useful ally!

At last the Dowager was satisfied that Mlle. de Mourjonville was individually a fellow-creature who might enjoy the honour of an interview with herself, and she soon settled the mode in which the interview was to be brought about.

Claudine had the same dressmaker as the Dowager, with this difference, that whereas Claudine caused every vestment she ever wore to be fashioned by the celebrated *couturière*, the Dowager duly ordered from her a certain number of pattern-dresses, which she then had copied by smaller people or sometimes even by her own maid. Nothing was easier than to meet Aspasia by chance, and Madame de Beauvoisin decided that this was precisely what she would do.

One day in the middle of all the silks, laces, and costly stuffs that east and west could furnish for the adornment of hyper-civilized woman, and a few days previous to a grand public ball to be given at the Opera, the Dowager found herself by chance standing face to face with Mlle. de Mourjonville, with a Buhl table between them, and a deep flounce of Chantilly lace held by a hand of each. The Dowager had the advantage at the outset, for she had made up her mind and knew what she was about, whereas our friend Aspasia was totally unprepared. No wonder therefore that she was somewhat taken aback, and actually let the lace drop out of her hand when she saw the needle-sharp eyes of the Marquise fixed upon her, and so close too! The Marquise was gracious—patronising,

no doubt—but gracious unmistakeably, and she smiled at Aspasia with a smile that did duty for a bow.

“You have good taste, Mademoiselle,” said she; “that lace is really beautiful.” Mademoiselle Mourjon was a woman and a Frenchwoman, and she would have been neither had she not been flattered by this eulogy from a real lady! a lady belonging to the purest Faubourg St. Germain! Aspasia was flattered, and involuntarily giving the Dowager more than her due, as people mostly do to those who exalt them, she actually blushed, and could only express her opinion that Madame la Marquise was too good.

The Dowager looked her full in the face, took her, mentally, in, whole and entire, and thought she knew all about her, which was a mistake, and attributable solely to Aspasia’s momentary embarrassment, the said Aspasia being immensely the Dowager’s superior in certain points. When the Marquise had, as she believed, mastered a thorough knowledge of her adversary, she advanced a step further.

“Alas!” said she, “we know each other, I see,” (Mlle. de Mourjonville was more than ever perplexed). “My poor brother!” and into this exclamation the Dowager threw a large amount of Christian commiseration.

“Don’t imagine, Mademoiselle,” vouchsafed she, with dignified kindness, “that in our family we do not know how to distinguish between those who are the misfortune of our nearest and dearest, and those who, on the contrary, have been obliged by circumstances

to serve where they cannot esteem; we all of us know perfectly well your claim to indulgence—to consideration—and we are rejoiced that my unhappy brother should have found so trustworthy a person to preside over his household, and, of course, in a certain degree, his interests.”

After this preamble the Dowager drew Aspasia into a conversation, in which the two points made clear to the latter's mind were, that in his world M. de Moranges was a man to be pitied, and spoken of as lost; and that there might be some gain achieved by serving the pious sister's plans for rescuing an erring brother's soul.

Much beyond this Aspasia did not get at first; but she fixed upon a second meeting the next day with Madame de Beauvoisin. This meeting was to take place in a private room at the fashionable dressmaker's; and as she went away, the Dowager ordered for herself a plain, grey silk gown and cloak, quite plain—she always dressed so simply—and which was only to cost a thousand francs.

So the next day this pair met again, but in very different conditions, for now Mlle. Mourjon knew what she was about, and was equal to a brace of Dowagers.

The demureness of aspect of the lady in waiting was such as to confound Madame de Beauvoisin. In the minutest details of her attire there was not so much as a thread but bore witness to virtue; the very buttons of her gloves were fastened severely, and the bow

of her bonnet strings under her chin attested the habit of sacrifice upon the altar of *les convenances*.

The Marquise was an authority upon these subjects, and she could not refuse her unqualified admiration to the woman before her. The get-up was perfect. From boot to chignon, all was so subdued, so quiet; and the face itself, too, had been so well composed over night, and all its salient points so toned down. No more aggressive sparkle in the eye, no more impertinence in the nose, no more contempt in the mouth, no more mischief anywhere. Every advantage of this kind was left to the *grande dame*, who was treated with deference, and with the completest acknowledgment of all her superiorities.

From the outset Aspasia accepted the situation of M. de Moranges as deplorable, and indulged in the most approved lamentations, commented upon and underlined, as it were, by deprecatory looks, eyes uplifted, and sighs. 'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful; but what could she, Aspasia de Mourjonville, do? She had her bread to earn, and the Marquis was a generous employer, just, too, and full of consideration for those who served him honestly. All that she could do was to keep herself clear of moral contamination, as it befitted the child of poor but respectable parents; and she mentioned her estimable family, as was her wont, with touching dignity.

"Though, in reality, Madame la Marquise," said she, "my view of your brother's conduct is the same

as yours, I cannot afford to abandon my situation. I must live, not for my own sake only."

"Of course, of course," responded the Dowager; "and it would be our duty to take care of your future; but surely if that woman," (it was in these terms that Claudine was invariably alluded to), "if that woman could be got rid of, and thereby my brother's fortune saved, we might combine to ensure your existence. What are your wages?"

The word escaped the Dowager, and much offended Mademoiselle Mourjon (who did not show it).

"My wages, Madame la Marquise," she replied with terrible humility, "are six thousand francs a year."

The Marquise was a far less accomplished actress than Aspasia, for the simple reason that she had never needed to play a part, having always had her own way through life. This led her astray.

"Six thousand francs!" she exclaimed; "well! that is enormous!" (one rapid, unseen glance shot from beneath Aspasia's eyelids), "enormous—not too much for your merits," added she, all at once correcting herself, "but, I mean, a great deal in itself for the position."

"Yes!" rejoined, meekly, Mlle. Mourjon, "to be overseer to a person like Madame Claudine, and go into public places with her!" and she indulged in a slight shudder.

"That is what I mean," responded the Dowager; "and besides that, one must take a fair half from the

salary" (she did not say wages this time) "for the dress. You have to dress handsomely" (she cast an arithmetical glance over Aspasia's toilette), "you can't dress under three thousand francs a year."

"I do not spend one," replied Mlle. Mourjon in the gentlest of tones, "for M. le Marquis is very considerate, and furnishes the larger portion of the dress which he knows to be necessary."

"Humph!" snorted the Dowager, displeased, and showing it; "but at all events, you see, even if we put it at the whole six thousand francs—no! we can say five—well at five thousand francs a year, it can never be more than a temporary engagement, the affair of a few years. I am a person of large ideas in affairs, I never aim at little savings—suppose we count upon ten years of employ:—that's a round sum; ten times five, that makes fifty thousand francs."

"But why should it last only ten years?" asked Aspasia, in a voice that kept growing softer and softer.

"My dear child! only ten years! why, do you imagine that Moranges will have continued ten years with that woman? And even suppose he did, why—what age is she?" she suddenly inquired.

"Nineteen."

"Well—ten years; that'll be nine-and-twenty; humph! she may last; she's a blonde. She will fatten and look well. My dear, what age are you?"

Madame la Marquise, like all utterly selfish people and all people who have the passion of rapacity, was losing sight of her interest in the exclusive pursuit of

her immediate object;—she was losing her game with Mlle. Aspasia, and arousing in the latter a feeling of hostility that she was a thousand miles from discerning.

“What age are you?” she repeated, “thirty? eh?”

“Yes, Madame la Marquise, I am thirty—just thirty (she was thirty-four).”

“Well then, count! In ten years you’ll be forty, and you won’t fill out—dark women don’t, women of our kind,” (the Marquise was so eager that she went in for what she thought condescension!), “women of our kind don’t improve. I know Moranges. When you get to look like an English old maid, lean and angular, as you will do, he will politely dismiss you—he will have nice looking women in his establishment, rely upon that. Now, you are a practical person as I am, and respectable, and have never cared for the sinful vanities of the lives led by such creatures as that woman, therefore it behoves you to take care of yourself.”

“And Madame la Marquise will help me to do so?” suggested Aspasia.

“My idea would be,” rejoined the practical Dowager, “that you should be enabled to retire upon an independence of say four or five thousand francs a-year of your own—which is the double of what I prove to you that you can ever hope to gain;—we said ten years at five thousand francs——”

“It is six,” murmured Aspasia.

“Yes—but the dress!” decided the Dowager, “five

counting the dress—well, ten years at five thousand, would make you fifty thousand francs; now if I secured to you one hundred thousand francs you would have five thousand francs a-year all your life.”

“The Marquis’s fortune ought to go to Monsieur Olivier de Beauvoisin, your son, ought it not?”

“Naturally—Olivier is his sole heir.”

“And people say M. de Moranges has two or three hundred thousand francs a-year.”

“Alas!” sighed the Dowager, “I fear not so much now—he is driving hard towards ruin.”

“But I don’t think Madame Claudine is the cause of that,” remarked Aspasia; “she is too stupid to drag him into any extravagance.”

“No! but she’s the pretext,” retorted the Dowager. “It’s that establishment of his which is ruining him.”

“But if she were to run away to-morrow with some one,” objected Mlle. Mourjon, “he might still go on entertaining.”

“Not he!” exclaimed the Dowager. “His vanity would be so hurt that he would shut up his house, and retire into the provinces—I know my brother—and I know where the danger lies—that woman must be got rid of.”

“But Madame la Marquise, he may marry!”

“Never! that is the one price Moranges will not pay for the right of receiving people at his house—he will pay with his money, not with his freedom.”

When Mlle. de Mourjonville parted from the Marquise, she agreed to think well over the proposal made

to her, to study well the state of affairs at the Hôtel de Moranges, and see whether the notion of getting rid of Claudine was a feasible one or not, and to report progress to her protectress within a few days.

"What a pity!" vouchsafed the Marquise as she bade adieu to Aspasia; "what a pity that his choice had not fallen upon such a woman as you, instead of upon that creature! With a clever head one can always come to an understanding!"

"You forget, Madame la Marquise," responded Mlle. de Mourjonville, in accents of injured innocence; "you forget that, with my education and respectable (though poor) parents, that would have been impossible. I should have always resisted M. le Marquis, or—married him!" She dropped these words and a deep curtsey together.

The Dowager for a second or two was too thoroughly stunned to speak—Aspasia did so for her.

"It is better as it is," she observed gently, "for I may be the means of restoring your brother to his family; let us hope for the best," and she left the Marquise with a vague impression of doubt as to what was the real nature of Mlle. de Mourjonville.

When the latter left the dressmaker's door to wend her way back to the Hôtel de Moranges, she passed through the passage St. Roch, a very unfrequented alley, and was accosted by Théophile Mardonnet.

"Here I am!" he said, taking off his hat, "obedient to your summons; it is precisely twelve o'clock."

"My good friend," she replied, slackening her pace,

and looking her companion full in the face; "I am not going to walk in the public streets of Paris with you by my side; at the entrance of the Rue St. Honoré we part; but I have something to say to you, and it is simply this: I will be put in possession of all the details of what passed seven years ago—I mean touching Camille and Olivier—I will know the whole."

"But if there is nothing to know?" replied Mardonnet, trying to look indifferent.

Mlle. Mourjon came to a full stop. "Well," she answered very quietly, "if that be really the case—if I do know all, and that you have nothing more to tell me," (Mardonnet began to look hopeful), "then so much the worse for you—for you will find me amongst your opponents."

And bowing courteously to him she walked on, leaving our friend Mardonnet gazing intently on the pavement, and lifting his hat up, and rubbing his forehead with his hand as though he were perplexed.

CHAPTER XXI.

Chords that Vibrate.

WHEN Henri Dupont de Laporte told the Dowager that Olivier could inform her better than any one else of all that had happened at the fête given by M. de Moranges in the forest of St. Germain, he told her what was strictly true, only the word *all* was susceptible of two readings. According to one reading the all was nothing; according to the other, the nothing was by far too much. But this was Olivier's secret, and it was not one he was likely to impart to his mother.

In truth, it would have been hard to say to whom he could have related what had passed, for he avoided as much as possible avowing to himself that anything had passed. And in reality what had happened? Simply that which will happen when the system of marriage (consequently the social system) is based upon the exclusion of love.

Though Claire was as lovely as it had ever fallen to the lot of a woman to be, she was not lovely to her husband, for she loved him not, and was not trained to think it wrong to marry without love, but on the contrary. What then could become of these two?

Olivier thought life a dull job, but not very much more so since his marriage. He had found out how to

deceive his guardians, in early days, and whether his wife or his mother were the deceived party, did not much matter, so long as he was free to do whatever he liked without any disagreeable results. "Whatever he liked." Yes! but did Olivier like anything? Well, there was the rub—and our friend Aspasia was right in her appreciation of M. de Beauvoisin. He rather liked music, certainly a particular kind of music, that which appealed solely to the senses, or came under the head of mere amusement. He was liable to be impressed by a beautiful voice, and Claudine had an unmistakeably beautiful one.

One day, as I have said, this voice trembled with passion, and the first note of a chord was struck which at first died away in silence. Olivier was as yet careless of Claudine, but Claudine was changed towards Olivier.

Olivier had got to be the daily visitor at the Hôtel de Moranges, and his uncle seemed used to his presence. He seemed even to have taken a sort of liking to him, and when M. de Moranges arranged the splendid fête he offered to his Hungarian guest, it was natural that Claudine should be confided to Olivier. When evening came on, M. de Beauvoisin sat by the Sphinx at the gorgeous dinner presided over by his uncle. She was singularly beautiful that night, but silent beyond her wont. On the other side of her sat the Hungarian Count, and the remarks he permitted himself upon her beauty were such as to rouse Olivier into paying unusual attention to her.

When the banquet was over, the whole party adjourned to the miniature theatre that M. de Moranges had obtained leave to have constructed for a dozen hours in the centre of one of the clearings of the forest.

The theatre was a band-box naturally,—a thorough miniature, in the Trianon style, exquisitely pretty, not too glaringly lighted; but in it, as M. de Moranges himself said, on entering it, one thing had been omitted: a public, namely, of wax-work spectators. At this omission, the donor of the fête was inconsolable. “I ought to have thought of that!” he exclaimed, as he cast a rapid glance over the necessarily unoccupied benches, which, few and well-contrived as they were, and masked by bushes of flowers, could not be otherwise than empty.

In the centre box sat M. de Moranges and his Hungarian friend, and two other men of such rank and fame that they stood apart from all others. In the proscenium box to the right, sat the Sphinx; in that to the left, our friend Aspasia, who, on that evening, free from constraint, and more or less left to her own devices, was Mlle. de Mourjonville with a vengeance. This fair Aspasia had her court, and played sovereign in it with the greatest possible ease; far outdoing Claudine in that respect; Claudine showing herself, as has been noted, singularly taciturn and inanimate on this occasion.

I have said that Olivier’s attention had been drawn toward Claudine by the openly expressed admiration

of the Hungarian Count; and, as he sat beside her in the box, he could not choose but remark to himself how strangely beautiful she was, and what a singular charm was hers. It was not her beauty only, it was the spell which, on that particular night, belonged to her, and was, as it were, the emanation of her whole being. All women, in the fatal hour of triumph of this kind, move in an atmosphere of their own, and, when they subjugate the senses of poor mortals, they are veiled in the goddess-cloud, which renders them invincible. It may be but for an hour, a moment, but that moment may destroy a life, and it comes almost certainly once. It had come for Olivier de Beauvoisin.

A heavy atmosphere gathered round those two as they sat side by side listening in silence to dangerous music, and the very air filled with perfume and love-charged looks.

"I fancy connoisseurs think her singing admirable," said, slowly and languidly, Claudine, as though she felt she ought to speak; "but how coldly she sings!"

"I would rather hear you sing!" replied Olivier, in a whisper.

Why did he speak so low? He couldn't tell; but he couldn't have spoken louder for the life of him.

Another long silence; and then,—

"One would really think your friend, Count Dupont, was paying court to Aspasia," observed Claudine, in the same slow and oppressed tone. "Look at him; how absorbed he seems by her."

"He will never pay court to anyone," murmured Olivier; "he is bronzed."

"Ah!" The word dropped from the moist ruby lips of the Sphinx, lingering as it dropped, with curious significance.

"You do not like my friend Henri," pursued Olivier, as though forcing himself to speech by a strong effort; "yet he is an intense admirer of yours."

"Of mine?" and the question was commented on by a slow but negative shake of the head.

"Of yours," repeated Olivier. "Why should he escape the common lot?" and his voice sank lower with each word he uttered, and he fed with his eyes upon the flush which each word called up on the magnolia-pale surface of Claudine's pale brow and cheek. "Do you know," he added, coming closer to her, so that the perfumes of her hair and of her breath wrapt him round. "Do you know that Henri has a legend about you? He says he saw you once, long ago, down in the country, near to us. A strange idea, isn't it?—quite a dream. But he persists in it."

The whisper was hushed on Olivier's lip by the effect of what he had said. The flush died out on Claudine's cheek and brow, leaving them paler than any magnolia leaf had ever been, the lids closed over her dark, dangerous eyes, and an involuntary shiver passed over her limbs as she tightly grasped the arm of the chair on which she sat.

It was the affair of two seconds; when Claudine spoke again it was in an altered tone, and on indif-

ferent subjects. She looked no more at her companion.

When the theatrical performance was over, M. de Moranges and his guests went to pay their compliments to the great artists who had enchanted them. Aspasia insisted on dragging off Count Dupont to see how the machinery of a theatre was worked (as though she had never before had an opportunity of acquiring this knowledge).

Olivier and Claudine stood alone upon the peristyle that had been erected as an entrance to the temporary little opera house. In front of them lay the forest, with small snaky white paths winding through all its greenery, and catching here and there in the dim distance a white ray of the moon.

M. de Beauvoisin tendered his arm to the Sphinx, and silently they went towards the forest paths, till there soon was nothing around them save the dark leafy wealth of the solemn wood, with the silver flood of the moonlight breaking in upon the mossy sward, and the smell of the earth and of the flowers rising up into the night air.

For some time neither spoke, but the breathing and the gait of both were unsteady, faltering under the mysterious weight that was oppressing them.

"Claudine," said Olivier, in a scarcely audible voice; "were you hurt by what I told you just now of Henri Dupont? why were you so?"

And saying this, he took in his the soft hand that lay heavy on his arm.

No answer came in words; but the bounding pulse responded—her head sank upon his shoulder, as an overladen flower that inclines to earth. Their lips, cold and trembling, met.

Love has countless different modes of expression—passion has but one. It is the same always; the same which compelled Francesca and Paolo to read no more that day, and which will doom to misery and ruin so many countless myriads of souls in this our inexplicable existence.

This was what had happened at the fête of the Marquis de Moranges, and at which Henri Dupont never guessed. Was it all? or was it nothing? That is as it may be—it was perhaps neither, but simply, as Mercutio says, Enough.

CHAPTER XXII.

Kindred Minds.

AT somewhere about the same time when what has been related in the last chapter was taking place between Olivier and the Sphinx, Claire de Beauvoisin was seated in a small room on the second floor of her hotel, her hands crossed over a book that lay open on her knees. The room was simply furnished, hung with chintz (a pale grey ground covered with clusters of field flowers), but there was not a trace of luxury in it. It was lighted by one lamp on a table near the window, the rest of it being in deep shade. Near this table sat the young Marquise, alone, and with the air of a person who is watching. The third quarter after nine had just struck, and was repeated from the several church clocks in the neighbourhood. When a long note, sounded by the house-porter upon the timbre, reached Madame de Beauvoisin's ears, she was not certain that, instead of announcing a visitor, it was not merely the third stroke of the last quarter of the hour. For what visitor was likely to come? and at all events none would disturb her, for she had given orders to close the doors, and say she did not receive. But it was a visitor nevertheless, for a footstep was audible upon the small staircase leading to this room, and a footman presented himself at the door, saying,—

"Madame la Marquise, it is Monsieur le Vicomte de Lancour, who——"

"It's only I, Claire," added a man's voice, and passing quickly before the servant, Victor advanced into the room, and, holding out his hands to his cousin, added, "I have a message from Olivier; of course you wouldn't refuse to let me in—besides, I won't keep you a moment."

Claire had started up at the sight of her cousin Victor, and had come forward a few steps, but without extending a hand to the unexpected visitor. She looked embarrassed and not pleased. The footman left the room and closed the door.

"Olivier is detained," began M. de Lancour; "it is not his fault if you are told so late, it is not my fault either—it is an accident; but Olivier can't possibly go with you to the ball; he thinks you had better go with his mother or your mother."

"I am not going to the ball," replied Claire; "and, pray don't speak so loud; Pierre is there," and she pointed with her hand to the dark part of the room, where stood a cradle hung with clear muslin curtains.

"You don't mean to say the child's ill," rejoined her cousin, with genuine and tender anxiety.

"I was seriously afraid he was so a few hours ago; but he is better now, and sleeping quite calmly. I had forgotten all about the ball."

"Well, Bouffémont would be ill-pleased if he heard that," said Victor, with a smile; "he fancies this house-warming ball of his is an object of European interest."

There is not a *cocodette* of the great world who will not be there, and they say Madame de Varignan's dress is to cost thirty thousand francs!"

"What message was it you brought?" inquired Claire, re-seating herself, and pointing to a chair, which her cousin appropriated to himself.

"Simply this: Olivier had intended to be back in Paris in time to take you to the ball at Bouffémont's. He found (just before dinner, I suppose, for his telegram is dated half-past six) that this was not possible; and then telegraphed off to me to tell me to put myself at your service, and advise you to go either with the Dowager or with Madame de Clavreuil. I didn't dine at home. The telegram was brought by my servant to the club, and I only got it twenty minutes ago, and came off to you instantly. You see it was nobody's fault."

"Olivier was out of town, then?" observed Claire.

"Olivier is at St. Germain, at the great fête given by his uncle——"

"By M. de Moranges?"

"Yes; Olivier has become quite a favourite with his uncle."

Madame de Beauvoisin looked at her cousin Victor with a strange expression of something verging on contempt. "I did not know," said she, "that Olivier was an *habitué* there."

"Perhaps I have done wrong, then, to tell you," rejoined M. de Lancour; "but I thought you knew it."

You must not forget that you yourself are on very good terms with your uncle Moranges."

"I meet my uncle Moranges abroad," said Claire, "chiefly at aunt Clémentine's, and I do like talking with him extremely; he is so much more agreeable and better informed than the younger men of our world. But with my uncle in his own home I have nothing to do, and I do think that they who go there do wrong."

"One must not be over hard," said Victor, turning a paper-knife round and round in his fingers; "one never ought to judge—one never knows all."

"I hope I never am hard upon any one," responded Claire; "I try not to be so."

Perhaps she had given to her words more expression than she intended, for M. de Lancour seemed in no hurry to break the silence that followed them. At last:

"When did your boy fall ill?" asked he.

"In the middle of the day. I was just going out to drive, when, as usual, I ran up to see him before going out, and found him hot and uneasy, and with a sudden cough that alarmed me. I sent for the doctor, and for aunt Clémentine; and for three or four hours he was very restless. But it seems it was nothing but the cutting of a tooth. The potion they gave him, calmed him and since the last two hours he has been quite quiet. Aunt Clémentine dined with me up here beside his cradle, and only left me at nine o'clock."

"May one look at Pierre?" asked Victor, breaking the silence that had established itself between the two.

"If you do so very quietly, so as not to wake him. Stay! I will give you a light," and rising, she lighted a taper in a flat candlestick, and accompanied her cousin to the child's bed. Victor raised the curtain with the touch of a practised nurse, and bent over the cradle, while Claire shaded the light with her hand.

The baby was sleeping soundly, with evident moisture upon his rosy skin, and on one cheek just a tiny flush remaining of what had marked the passage of his few hours' fever.

"Dear little fellow," murmured Victor, in just that tone of genuine fondness which—whatever be the other feelings in the mother's heart—will not leave her unsympathetic. And then he looked scrutinisingly at the sleeping child, touched his forehead cautiously, saw there was no fever left, and as he turned away, said again, "Dear little fellow!" and returned to his seat opposite to the Marquise, having first bid her put aside the curtains that were round the cradle.

"But they say he should be kept warm," objected she, obeying all the same.

Victor smiled. "Nonsense!" said he; "that is the worn-out science of stupid, worn-out doctors; a child should have air."

"How can you possibly know anything about children?" inquired the young Marquise.

"Because I have been twelve years a soldier," replied he; "and he must be a sorry soldier who in that time has not learned how to take care of his own species, whether men, women, or children. I limit my

doctor's skill, you see, at this moment to human beings, but an officer who should not be a veterinary surgeon would have learnt only half his trade; if a man does not learn an immense deal in the army, he runs the risk of forgetting nearly everything. Most men do learn, luckily."

Claire shook her head. "That is not what people generally say in our world," observed she.

"Claire," said Victor, at a later period of this conversation, "listen to me once, we do not meet often now. Do you think I cannot trace your mother's hand, and above all, the hand of that execrable mother of Olivier's, in your altered manner to me? Do you think I don't know what they have been saying to you? Do you think I don't see the difference in you, Claire? Do you think you have not hurt me more than any other living creature upon earth could have hurt me?"

There was a tender reproachfulness in Victor's tone as he thus spoke that stirred Claire's heart, and made her turn pale, while tears gathered under her drooping eyelids.

"That saintly aunt Clémentine, too," he pursued; "do you think——"

"Stop," interrupted Claire; "you do her injustice. Aunt Clémentine has altogether another creed. I believe she thinks that everything may be forgiven where there is a real attachment;" her voice was very low, and she spoke with hesitation.

"So much the better for her. But then, in God's

name, Claire, my own Claire, why did she allow them to marry you to Olivier?" The words burst from him involuntarily.

Claire, pale as death, looked at him, speechlessly, but looked at him full in the face, stared at him vacantly with her large, hopeless eyes.

"Forgive me, dear child," said he, gently. "I have let myself be carried away by my extreme affection for you" (the Marquise had in one second recovered all her self-possession); "we were brought up together, dear, though I was ten or eleven years older than you; you were my little sister—you were a child whom I could still take on my knee when I left St. Cyr (and how you admired my uniform that day!); you grew gradually into the sweet, lovely, darling girl you were last year, while I was battling through life in God knows what out-of-the-way places; every time I came back you were more charming, lovelier, dearer, and so glad, so happy to see me, Claire! and then, one fine day, when I returned home from Algeria, I find you gone—gone to Italy with your husband—married to Olivier de Beauvoisin."

"You will, I presume, scarcely deem it a proof of friendship to speak ill of my husband to me?" remarked the Marquise.

M. de Lancour rose, took a few steps forwards, and then backwards, and standing in front of his cousin, "Claire," said he, sadly, "it is evident that you have been taught to think so ill of me that you cannot understand me any more. I will not im-

portune you longer, but I have said too much not to say more. When I lost you, Claire, I lost the sweetest, best thing a man can have in life—a true and loving sister. That ought not to have been. The man you should have married, ought to have been my brother for the love I bore you, and to you, my married sister, Claire, I ought to have been able to come and confide all that is painful and irretrievable in my existence; but the eternal system was practised with you as with all others. A man,—no, a fortune, a name, an estate, was fixed upon, and your establishment was planned out and achieved; you never dreamt of resistance, no one ever dreamt of rescuing you; the same thing had been done for centuries and submitted to by everybody whom everybody else ever knew, and therefore why should you be an exception. Had I been here, Claire, I would have appealed to you, and prevented the sacrifice, for you were better worth than that, my poor, dear cousin—at all events, better worth then.”

“Worth very little now, do you mean to imply?” demanded the Marquise, but more in sadness than in anger.

“No, Claire, dear,” rejoined Victor, “I do not mean anything of the sort, and I will prove it to you. I am not in pain for what the world, unworthy as it is to judge, will call your worth. I am in pain for your happiness. Marriage as we practice it in this country leads to misery, for if sin be avoided the entire nature is narrowed down; all human beings to be worth anything must love, and therefore, my own dear cousin Claire, do your best to love your husband!”

"I do so," rejoined she, defiantly.

"No, Claire, you do not, for he is morally a stranger to you, as you are to him. It won't do, dear child, there is misery in it. Bring up that boy there," and he pointed to the child's cradle, "to do the very reverse of all that his forefathers have done; teach him to love ardently, deeply, but to be bound where he has loved, to love purely; teach him that there is no dignity, and no happiness out of a married life based on love; and Claire, my dear little sister, Claire, force yourself to love your husband, devote yourself to the study of him, know him, find out his better points, educate, fashion, transform him; there is something in everyone, bring out that something in Olivier."

"There is nothing!" muttered Claire, as though speaking to herself.

Their eyes met, and both looked blank.

"And you told me you loved him!" exclaimed Victor mournfully.

They did not speak long together after that, but when he was gone Claire went to her child's cradle, knelt down by it, and hiding her face in the coverings, prayed and wept. Every word of Victor's was the reflection of what she felt in her own heart, and what it seemed now too late to feel, and the lessons he tried to teach her were no longer applicable, for the one, only one for whom she would have risked and sacrificed everything, was devoted to another woman, and imploring her to do her utmost to love another man. "It was so hard?" thought Claire.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In for it.

A WEEK had passed since the fête given by M. de Moranges at St. Germain.

It was early in the day, and Olivier was in his stable, (the stable he looked down into from the plate glass over the chimney piece in his room). He was walking up and down, with the eternal cigar in his mouth; by his side walked Count Dupont de la Porte: the stable was for the moment empty, and the two men were speaking low.

"So that you suppose the Dowager actually never knew anything at all about it?" said Henri Dupont, continuing a conversation already begun before.

"I don't believe she ever guessed at a single incident; but then, you know, the Abbé Lannion was such a screen! his fright was something ludicrous, because he never could, to the last, understand the matter as it really happened, nor conceive how his proselytising, and above all, his political zeal, could have got me into such a scrape; he thinks to this hour he did his duty in trying to convert Mardonnet; what's more, he is convinced he did convert him, and he would act over again just as he acted before, if all were to recommence; but it was marvellous to see how

for two years he always managed to get money whenever it was required."

"What! so the abbé furnished the means of stopping Mardonnet's mouth till you were of age?"

"Naturally. I was but nineteen; there were two years to run, so six or seven times we had to furnish instalments to Mardonnet."

"Well, I wonder the fellow didn't try to frighten your mother," propounded Dupont, stopping short in his lounge.

"No one would attempt that," rejoined Olivier. "Bless you, she's as well known as the white wolf; not only down in our country, but even here in Paris. You just go and ask anybody connected with affairs, or with the Bourse, any Jew, or any broker, about the Dowager Marquise de Beauvoisin, and see what they'll say. Frighten her? No one ever did that; besides, what stopped Mardonnet was, that he knew if she was applied to, he would lose his money."

"How do you mean that, Olivier?" exclaimed Henri. "You don't imagine, do you, that your mother would have refused to repay what you really had borrowed?"

"My mother refuse!" echoed the Marquis; "of course she would. I was a minor, and she could not only have refused, but have prosecuted Mardonnet for conspiracy, and I don't know what besides."

"But the disgrace to your name?" interrupted Dupont; "the shame, the scandal? she would have recoiled before all that?"

"Not she," affirmed her son; "and Mardonnet well knew that, and left her in peace. Refuse, indeed," he continued, "I should think she would have refused; and quite right too."

"Right, Olivier?" said Count Dupont, in a severe tone, and looking his companion full in the face. "Right! why, then, if that's your creed, didn't you imitate her example? Why didn't you refuse to pay? or why didn't you tell her yourself, and make her help you out of the scrape?"

Olivier evaded his friend's gaze, turned pale, and then scarlet, took his cigar from his lips, then put it back and drew a tremendous puff, then coughed from having half strangled himself. At last—

"You take one's words so literally," stammered he, still coughing, and looking the very picture of embarrassment. "Of course, if I had really meant to be dishonest I could have been so easily: but, you see, I paid in the end. I only say what my mother would have done;—my mother's a tough one. But you do catch one up so, Henri; one says things one don't mean."

"It's a bad practice, Olivier," replied Dupont; "and there are things that ought never to be uttered even in joke."

They lounged on a few paces in silence.

"And so," resumed Count Dupont, "the abbé provided you with funds for two whole years?"

"Yes: it didn't come to so very much after all. Twelve thousand francs about. But, Lord! he got it

for the asking; old ladies gave it him, and thought they were buying eternal salvation by chapel building. He could get any sum in a given time."

"And I presume you repaid him?"

"I should think so: he took me ten per cent. interest, which he swore was for the poor."

"And what made Mardonnet marry Camille Leblond?" inquired Henri.

"Why, her money, to be sure," replied Olivier; "she has been a milch cow to him. She brought him no inconsiderable sum at once; and she got him the appointment of cashier to that bank that was founded somewhere in Moldavia or Wallachia, and where they went two or three years ago to live. Besides, to say the truth, I believe Mardonnet was in love with her."

And the Marquis indulged in a laugh that prevented him from seeing the expression of disgust upon his friend's countenance.

"Were you?" asked Dupont.

"Not I," was the rejoinder.

"Then all that money was spent, and all that scrape got into without any sentimentality?" remarked Henri. "It was insanity with premeditation, was it?"

"Well, you see, Roger and Gaston both ran after the girl; and Gaston was rich, and could spend a good deal, and, of course, I couldn't be outdone by him;—and Camille was immensely the fashion."

"So we note down then: item—no love," said Dupont.

"Well," retorted Olivier, "I don't think I'm exactly the sort of man to go falling in love;" and he appeared to feel a proud satisfaction at being able to make this statement.

"We say: item, no love," pursued Henri. "Tell me frankly, Olivier, was there any amusement?"

"I should say none in particular," was the answer; "on the whole, rather a bore,—as those kind of things always are."

"And yet it cost tolerably dear," resumed Count Dupont. "Well, my good fellow, I never knew the rights of the story before, and I used to regret that I had been absent when it all happened; but now I see I shouldn't have been of much use to you."

He went his way, and Olivier mounted the stairs leading to his splendid blue and silver furnished room.

He had scarcely been in it more than a few minutes, when his own confidential valet entered, and informed him that a lady was in M. le Marquis's ante-room, and requested to see him upon most urgent business.

"It is the second time she has been here this morning," said the man; "she came about an hour ago, when M. le Marquis had just gone down into the stable with M. le Comte Dupont, so she went away, and said she would come again."

"Is she young or old?" asked Olivier.

"It is hard to say, M. le Marquis," replied the valet, "she is so very thickly veiled; but from the voice I should say young, and from her dress it is

easy to see that she is a great lady—the richest of everything she has on!”

“Well, Leroux, I suppose she must be let in,” said M. de Beauvoisin, in a sort of half-victimised tone, and rubbing the back of his head with an air of great perplexity. “I hope there’s no family complication impending anywhere,” he muttered, as his servant left the room.

The rustle of silk was heard winding up the staircase, a luscious, spicy perfume invaded the room, as through the open door stepped the form of a veiled woman. M. de Beauvoisin bowed, as the door was closed, and pointed to a seat, saying, very politely,—

“Madame, may I ask to what I owe the honour——”

But as the lady advanced towards him, and still standing, took off her veil, the words died upon his tongue. He started and turned pale with unmistakable alarm.

“You, Claudine!” he exclaimed; “you here! What can have made you commit such an act of madness?”

“You!” she replied, coming closer to him, and laying her hand upon his arm. “Why have you never come since the other day? You said you would come the next day, and I waited at home till evening—I said I was not well, and could not go out driving—but you never came; it was a week yesterday.”

“But I have been,” faltered Olivier, “I have been twice.”

“Yes,” she resumed, “at times when you knew there would be no one in; you came the day of the

Matinée at the Pré Catelan, and on Sunday before the return from the races; you knew I should be forced to go to both."

Claudine was much altered during this week, far more beautiful than before, but of quite a different beauty. All the sleepy repose had fled from her countenance, and the latent beauty that Henri Dupont had foreseen in her on that rainy night in the courtyard at Clavreuil, had sprung to life with strange, nay, terrible intensity. The lustrous eyes were full of flame, and their lids no longer heavily drooping over them, seemed drawn upwards by the action of the hard, sharp, relentless eyebrow (the Medusa-like feature of the face, as Henri Dupont had at once divined). Her lips, no longer like wet rubies, were dry and unequally red; the smooth satin of her skin was disturbed, and dark shadows lay upon it, and the hand she had laid upon M. de Beauvoisin's arm burned like an ember just snatched from a furnace.

Olivier, it must be avowed, felt uncomfortable and helpless, as he became, with one glance, aware of the sudden alteration in the Sphinx. The woman no longer lay dormant in Claudine. Was this anyone's fault; hers, or his, or whose? That was too much of an enigma for Olivier's faculties; but the whole affair, as he mentally styled it, was unpleasant.

What was he to do? Why, of course, get Claudine to go away as fast as possible; but how? He scarcely knew what to say to her, as she stood gazing

at him with her terrible eyes, and still holding his arm with her burning fingers.

"Tell me why you have never come?" she recommenced; "why did you break your promise?"

"My dear creature," stammered Olivier, "I must take care of—of your reputation;" and when she had released his arm, and was looking him through and through, he first perceived what a foolish speech, in his confusion, he had made.

"My reputation?" she repeated in a tone of such bitterness that it frightened him. "What is that? Do not say things of that kind to me, or I shall kill myself." (Olivier shuddered.) "Concealment is our only policy, and I will answer for nothing being found out, if I am not driven mad by doubt of you." She came nearer to him once more, and took his hand in hers: "I will be as gentle and obedient as a dog," murmured she, "so long as you do not cease to love me; but if I fear to lose you, I shall go mad. I have not slept for a week, and, this morning, I resolved to tell your uncle everything;" (Olivier was stunned by this unexpected blow;) "but then I thought it was best to try and see you first, and so I came. I was desperate, for I had not even the hope that you were ill! I heard indirectly of your goings and comings at the club."

"How did you contrive to get away alone?" inquired Olivier, anxious to know what was the measure of imprudence committed.

"I said I was going to church to hear a mass for my mother," she answered, naively. "I do go some-

times, and then I go alone; Aspasia only comes on Sundays and great feast days."

"Well, you must make haste back now," observed Olivier, "or we shall all be in danger of detection: in ten minutes the breakfast-bell will ring, and my mother breakfasts here to-day. When she is in the house, I am never safe, for she might come up here."

"I will go directly," responded Claudine, "and do whatever you bid me, so that I am sure of you. But you will not stay away any more? You will come as you used to do, every day?"

"Yes, dear," was the rejoinder of the vanquished lover.

All the menace and all the fierceness of disappointed passion had expired in the whole being of the Sphinx. She laid the scented waves of her fair hair under Olivier's chin, wound her arm about his neck, and spun her Dejanira web around him naturally, and not meaning any harm.

Olivier's fate was sealed. Claire de Clavreuil's husband, the man she had, unloving, espoused, and who loved not her, was imprisoned in the toils of a Traviata, to be extricated therefrom as it might please blind chance.

"Olivier?" whispered Claudine, as, half-disengaged from his embrace, she still clung to him, with looks that seemed as though they would never loose their hold; "tell me now, why you did not come?"

He hesitated, passed his hand over his forehead, and then, looking at her, said,—

"Because I felt you were an awful danger for me, Claudine; and, hang it, so you are!" he added, in a more decided tone.

"But you won't try to escape from it any more, will you?" she murmured, nestling her head once more into his neck.

"Oh, no," rejoined he, with an accent she did not understand; "it's no use trying now: I'm in for it."

What Olivier's reflections might have been upon his present situation when once Claudine was safely gone, it would be difficult to tell; they were cut short by the entrance of the Dowager through the door communicating with the rest of the hotel, who came to ask him if he had not heard the breakfast-bell.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Rising Waves.

THE day had come when Claudine had discovered that which was hitherto undreamt-of in her philosophy; a fire had been suddenly lighted, and had made visible many objects unguessed at before. Many, but not all—for Claudine's conscience was full of dark corners and nooks, where no light had ever penetrated. It was not as if you, for instance, had been illumined by the flame of a forbidden passion; you would, of course, have seen at one glance, clearly, the whole mesh of your duties and dangers, and would have immediately done your duty and drampled sin under your heel. But then you are born respectable and incapable of wrong; you are warranted to go straight all the days of your life, and not to make mistakes, and even should you, by any untoward circumstance, swerve from the straight line, you, being like the British soldier, who doesn't know when he is beaten, will go on unheeding, and esteem yourself victorious. But Claudine was horribly in the dark, and groped about among her instincts and her duties in a most unsatisfactory fashion.

What might to you, or to any ordinarily educated person, seem anomalous, presented itself as compatible

to the confused mind of this girl. Her gratitude to M. de Moranges was not in the slightest degree diminished (that she would have regarded as a crime); but she saw no reason why gratitude to him, and a very different feeling for Olivier, should not co-exist so long as concealment was practised. As to most primitive natures, concealment appeared to Claudine a virtue—a kindness done to the deceived; and here is one of the main points in which the educated err when they judge the uneducated—namely, those to whom no true knowledge of right and wrong, no genuine notion of integrity has been given.

Claudine had, since the day of the fête at St. Germain, sprung suddenly up to the topmost pitch of what was destined to be her fame. The Hungarian, to whom that fête had been given, had spoken of her beauty in such extravagant terms that the mass of men whose office it is to be the collective Paris of such Hellens—the frequenters of clubs, *coulisses*, and race-courses—had momentarily adjudged to her the prize, and she was for a brief space a reigning queen.

This mainly helped her in her work of concealment, for when any woman, in no matter what sphere, becomes the fashion, it is hard in the stir and rumour around her to fix upon any one particular individual as favoured beyond his compeers. Claudine had far more her own way than before, for M. de Moranges was flattered in his proprietorship, and felt full of grace and benignity towards the woman who, being

openly his, was acknowledged as the best, the most complete of her kind. This was right and proper on Claudine's part; there was a fittingness in it which pleased the Marquis's exquisite taste, and he regarded her with the same favour he extended to the horse, or picture, or jewel, which might have cost him dearest. He did not, as yet, know what was the price he was destined to pay for this pleasure; but he was charmingly condescending to Claudine, and quite spoiled her, allowing her to obey the dictates of her own will in almost everything, excepting always the article of gaudy attire, and just one other item, on which he was gently, elusively inflexible. Claudine wanted to be called Madame de Savaray. She had found out that among the titles belonging to the house of Moranges existed that of Baron de Savaray, proceeding from a small estate (scarcely more than a farm) still remaining in the possession of the family, and for this appellation she longed. It was a real thing! a thousand times better than Ste. Amaranthe, or St. Pierre, or St. Romain, or any other saint of the whole calender applied to an imaginary name. Madame de Savaray! or even, who knows? Madame la Baronne de Savaray! for that Claudine hungered and thirsted, more even than for the flaunting stuffs embroidered in silver and gold, with which she was dying to sweep the dusty footpath in the broad avenue of the Champs Elysées. But neither of these things could the Sphinx obtain. M. de Moranges was as inexorable on the subject of the name which was in the annals of his

house, and had been worn in days of yore by its maids and matrons, as he was upon that of the gorgeous wearing apparel; nor did he (luckily) understand the insistence with which day after day Claudine appeared to hanker after both.

Our friend Aspasia, too, found much to employ and please her in the increasing brilliancy of Madame Claudine's position. She indulged in hopes and prospects of gain on all sides, and being decidedly a combinative genius, thought she saw her way to serving several masters at once, and did not despair of large remuneration from the Dowager, from M. de Moranges, and perhaps even from Olivier! But that was her secret.

"You had your usual luck, Moranges, when you laid hands on that piece of feminine intelligence!" said M. de Sauveterre one day to his friend, glancing across the *salon* at Aspasia, whose back was turned towards the speakers. "She is invaluable! so amusing and ready witted, yet so full of tact, and always in her place! truly a wonderful person, and a first rate manager, isn't she?"

"Yes! she is first rate," replied the Marquis, with conviction, "and it is, as you observe, a piece of undeniable luck! But Paris is the mother earth of that kind of female; she grows nowhere else, but comes to perfection here."

"Female! female? if you will," objected old Sauveterre; "I said a piece of feminine intelligence, I never said anything else, and that is what she is, and that

does grow here, and as you say, comes to perfection; but Paris don't grow women, my good friend; real, genuine women; look over there," and he pointed with his finger to where, on the threshold of the glass door opening into the garden, Claudine stood surrounded by a group of men. "Look at those outlines, Paris never grew that! *ma foi!* but she has grown into a superb creature. I could not have believed it possible such a wretched-looking half starved thing as she seemed . . . Well! that comes of being a connoisseur in art, I suppose. But you certainly made a glorious hit, old fellow!"

There had been a breakfast at the Hôtel de Moranges, and some fifteen or twenty men were lounging about in the drawing-rooms or in the garden or in the smoking-room. M. de Moranges never smoked himself, and never allowed smoking in his house, except in the room set aside for that purpose.

He was standing against the chimney piece of the principal *salon*, whilst M. de Sauveterre was seated close by, when the colloquy above repeated took place. Aspasia was busy with coffee and liqueurs at a table at the other end of the room, and Claudine, as has been stated, formed the centre of a group at the window.

The Marquis, as M. de Sauveterre's words fell pleasantly on his ear, directed a long, scrutinising look to Claudine; a look that seemed to say: "If there be a flaw anywhere, I will find it, and when found, impartially pass judgment on it." It was a hard, ap-

praising look; but when it was withdrawn, it was full of satisfaction; of a quiet self-sufficing sort of pride.

Some one asked Claudine to sing, and M. de Moranges echoing the request, she went towards the piano, and obediently opened it. But with that act her obedience and passivity ceased. When she began to sing she was herself, her new and recent self, and it self-love had not thickened the fine subtle perceptions of M. de Moranges, he would surely have asked himself whence came the impassioned tones to which he listened? It was all so different; the statue had once been so plainly there, where now breathed, blushed, and glowed the soft-fleshed, living woman.

But the Pygmalion? where was he? No one asked himself this question; neither the Marquis, nor that lynx-eyed Aspasia Mourjon (women seldom recognise the testimony of that infallible witness, the voice)! But the effect produced was great, and the applause won by Claudine was enthusiastic.

The young gentleman who accompanied her, a beardless aspirant to lyrical renown, was unfortunately a worshipper of classical music, and swore by the true gods, from Palestrina down to Wagner, and had the absurdity to beg Claudine to sing something of Mozart's, which she did. Here she was at once second, or indeed, third rate, singing a string of notes as her master had taught her, and totally lacking the superior intelligence required to give the higher idea, to translate the musical sense. This was a failure, and the weight of it fell entirely on the shoulders of the youth who

had been so ill-advised as to petition for a sample of the Old Masters. Decidedly, classical music was a bore. Offenbach was better than that; but best of all were the sentimental strains in which the words are everything, and in which the expression given to them proves the value of the singer.

M. de Moranges was no connoisseur in music (men of his stamp never are). But truth compels always; and, as in the false art Claudine practised, the passion was true, so that passion compelled him, and he listened, and was impressed, carried away, before he avowed to himself his surprise.

When his guests were all gone the Marquis approached Claudine, and spoke to her, and praised her in a manner he was not used to affect. She felt her favour, and with a diffident air, and raising her eyes timidly, said she wished she might speak frankly.

"Speak with entire frankness," replied the Marquis, with an accent she had not hitherto heard (and apparently forgetting the dangers connected with the Barony of Savaray). "I am not in the habit of intimidating you, I hope?" This was added with more than condescension.

"I should like to go on the stage," faltered Claudine, hurriedly, and fluttering as it were under the beat of her own blushes. "Oh! I should so like it!" she added, joining her hands, and looking more beautiful with each instant.

M. de Moranges did not answer at first. He was absorbed in his contemplation of Claudine. At last,

with an expression of paternal fondness—fond, but paternal—“The stage!” he repeated, smiling, and raising his eyebrows with a sort of compassionate surprise, “foolish child! the stage? that is hard work for a pretty woman! it spoils the complexion. No beauty stands it long.”

Claudine knew her wish was denied, and shrank back into her old subserviency.

“I only said I should like it,” she rejoined, crouchingly. “I hope you will not be angry.”

“Certainly not,” was the gracious answer; “and to prove it to you, I will take you this evening to hear Thérésa; she is an artist in her way, and as you are getting to sing so well, it is right you should hear every one, Thérésa, as well as La Nilsson—the two extremes.”

It was so very rare a thing for the Marquis to appear in any public place with Claudine, that the full extent of his benignity seemed appreciated by both ladies; our friend Aspasia simply murmuring that she was rather taken unawares by this honour, her spring toilettes not being in thorough readiness, which resulted in a munificent recommendation to provide herself for that evening with a mantelet of Black Chantilly lace. (Black, not white! black was so unobtrusive!)

CHAPTER XXV.

The Meeting of the Waters.

THE evening was a beautiful one, warm and balmy, yet with just a light breeze stirring the leaves of the trees, and floating the perfumes of flowers to mortal senses. The Champs Elysées were full of busy life, carriages rolling up and down the wide avenue, and loungers on foot thronging the pavement and the spaces between the trees. The hum of the crowd rose no higher than the topmost boughs, and then merged into the stillness of night; and down upon the human ant-hill, with its would-be importance, its agitation and its mock finery, gazed the eternal stars—those self-same stars that were at that self-same hour shining over Nature's glories, mirroring their serene light in streams and seas, piercing through forest depths, or letting their rays tremble on the crests of lone lofty hills, chamois haunted, and even in summer snow swathed. The selfsame stars!

Immutable! yes, truly; whilst all beneath them was composed of atoms for ever changing; gone before you could chronicle their being.

But in spite of their short-livedness and their shortcomings, these ephemeral creatures, which furnish the aggregate sum of existence in a great city, wherein it

is possible there may not be one really grand human soul, these atoms are as interesting as the stars, for they suffer. All have their passion, and we know it, we who have passed through it in our time.

There they were, in crowds that evening, round the illuminated platform where Thérésa was singing; there they were, all;—women and men, the leaders of the great masquerade, of the noisy, gaudy, ugly, barbarously ill-dressed world of *La Cocodetterie*. Round every table sat groups of twos, fours, and more. Round one table, full in the glare of the lamps that lighted the temporary stage, were drawn together some ten or a dozen individuals worse-dressed and noisier than the rest, and who might have been supposed to belong to what is styled the lowest set, had there not been something excessive about them which betrayed affectation, the assumption of an appearance not in accordance with the reality.

In this party—some of whom are already known to us—there were three or four women, painted, dyed, and hung about with ornaments and clothes, much after the fashion in which probably a Red Indian female would deck herself out were she suddenly let loose among the wardrobe treasures of a Paris costume shop. The fact which chiefly bore witness to the status of these ladies in what is termed Society was the way in which they had succeeded in making themselves less good-looking than they were, which is a fault rarely committed by the professional, she whose success in beautifying herself is gauged by the result in hard

cash. These, being amateurs, and accounted respectable, had mostly defaced instead of embellishing nature's work; colouring blush-rose complexions tawny, dying dark tresses red or yellow, blackening delicate eyebrows, tracing obvious violet lines on satin skins not intended to reveal veins, and in general so upsetting all nature's harmonies, that the end attained was pretty much that achieved by children when, by the help of burnt cork and mamma's paint-box, they give themselves up to a regular bout of play acting.

And their dress! who shall record the laughable errors there?—laughable, had they not pointed at the momentary eclipse of France's once great privilege, taste! The flowing lines made angular, the straight lines tortured into crookedness, puffs where there should have been plaitings, and that flattened which should have swelled, flowers tied down by glass beads, feathers crushed by silver and gold, insects crawling over lace, and birds escaping from shoulder-knots of ribbons—everywhere deformity of contour and discordance of hue, everywhere distortion and tumult such that, according to Shelley's theory of the "interpenetration of senses," ear and eye should have equally ached at the confusion.

A loud and prolonged burst of applause awarded to Thérésa extinguished the sound of minor conversations. When it had subsided, the evidence of a rather lively discussion came from the table where sat the large group of fashionable ladies and gentlemen

to whom the Parisians have given the names of cocodets and cocodettes.

"Mlle. de Vieupont," says Henri Dupont, "was a very handsome highly educated girl without a farthing, whom Vouvray—like an idiot—went and married, God forgive me, for love! She was penniless, and he gave her a hundred and fifty thousand francs a year—is that a fact? Yes or no."

"Well, but," began the small young gentleman, with the squeaky voice; "I have heard it also said that she had to suffer a great deal with Vouvray."

"Suffer!" echoed a very pretty little woman with dark eyes and a green paroquet with a plum in its beak, nestling in amongst the curls of her chignon; "who would not have suffered with such a fool as Vouvray? Why the man's a perfect *crétin*."

"He proved it by marrying Jeanne de Vieupont," observed Count Dupont; "and upon my word, I hope she did suffer, that's all I can say, for, according to my ideas, she richly deserved it."

"You are a positive bear," declares a remarkably handsome blonde, with a quantity of frizzled fair hair, and a plateful of strawberries and currants on the top of her head by way of hat. "See, there comes Olivier!" and she pointed to where a new comer was visible, advancing towards the table where sat the largest of the groups present. "Olivier," she added familiarly; "come here; there is room for you."

M. de Beauvoisin seemed to hesitate a moment, half-raised his hat to two ladies who were sitting at a

table in the close neighbourhood of the one to which he was summoned, and then, coming straight on, exchanged greetings and hand-shakings with those around it.

The handsome blonde was apparently busy with some detail of the attire of one of the two ladies whom the Marquis de Beauvoisin had bowed to, for as she whispered to him, the words, "If it is real, it is worth ten thousand francs at least," were audible; and so, shortly after, were these: "I would give the world to know who made it, whether Félicie or Worth; couldn't you ask her? I must have one like it."

Olivier seemed to elude the commission thus half-imposed upon him, for he changed his place. By this movement the little black-eyed lady with the bird and plum in her chignon was discovered as stage directions term it, and the Marquis de Moranges suddenly added himself to the group, seizing both hands of this lively personage and exclaiming,—

"*A la bonne heure*, princess! so you have come back to us at last."

These two, plunging at once into the noisiest and apparently most diverting of conversations, the blonde lady, not used, as it seemed, to be unattended to, deliberately rose, and seated herself next to M. de Beauvoisin, and right opposite to the magnificent mantilla of Alençon lace worn by the Sphinx (for she it was), and touching the genuineness whereof she had been so anxious.

At the end of a few minutes Olivier was drawn

forcedly into a whispered conversation, mixed up with dainty fan-tappings and loud laughter on the lady's part, and now and then she obliged him to bend down so low and so near to her to catch her words that her fair hair touched his cheek.

The Sphinx sat right opposite to them, silent, and feeding upon what she saw with her glowering eyes. Her lips grew with every second more tightly compressed, and her cheek paler, whilst her eyes eat, as it were, corrosively into what they gazed upon.

How long she thus sat she knew not, it seemed a long space of time; but at last she could bear it no longer.

"Aspasie," said she, in a hoarse whisper, "look across there; who is that fair woman? there! with the strawberries in her hair? I know her face."

"That!" answered Mlle. Mourjon, with a wicked laugh, "that's the famous Duchesse de Varignan."

"I thought so," gasped Claudine; "not even one of us!"

"That's as it may be," sneered Aspasie; "her set call her respectable. I believe her to be M. de Beauvoisin's mistress—but good heavens! what is the matter, madame, are you ill?" she exclaimed, as she felt Claudine's hold on her arm relax suddenly.

The Sphinx had apparently fainted.

And over this, too, the eternal stars looked serenely down.

CHAPTER XXVI.

On the Scent.

WHEN Claudine fainted she did not fall senseless to the ground—as happens so frequently in romances, but rarely anywhere else; she leaned back upon her chair, and, whilst her hand relaxed its hold on her companion's arm, her head inclined towards her companion's shoulder, so that Aspasia had only to move slightly forwards in order to support the Sphinx's falling weight.

Without raising her voice Mlle. de Mourjonville requested help from two of the bystanders, strangers to her, but gentlemanly-looking men, and, without any noise or fuss, Claudine was removed from the battlefield where she had been wounded. As (like most people in similar cases) she was not wholly inanimate, she was quickly and quietly conveyed to her own carriage, and transported to the Hôtel de Moranges, under the watchful Aspasia's care.

The entire scene passed, however, under the eyes of the two men whom it most nearly concerned, and who stirred not one step.

M. de Moranges' attention was suddenly arrested by the movement Aspasia made to prevent Claudine from falling, but he had not caught the expression of intense anxiety with which Aspasia had been questioned

by the Sphinx. Olivier de Beauvoisin had, and understood the whole in an instant, though his mental faculties, as we know, were not remarkable for brightness.

But both men sat still, in the face of the stricken Traviata, because both, whatever their other faults, were perfectly well bred, and knew how to live, as the French phrase runs.

The uncle did not look at his nephew, nor the nephew at his uncle, for very different reasons; neither did they seem to have eyes for what was happening opposite to them, but watching Claudine through their eye-lids, as one would suppose, she was as though they knew her not.

M. de Moranges pursued his lively talk with the loud, rattling princess, who really had noticed nothing, and than whom the parrot with its plum in her chignon was not more indifferent. He lost not a detail of what passed (he seldom did, being an acute observer at all times), and saw two young men, both of whom he knew, help to bear away the person who did the honours of his house; but the keenest scrutiny would have failed to discover in him the faintest trace of emotion.

Olivier, too, went on whispering with Madame de Varignan, and being whispered to; but the blonde Duchess's notice had been too much riveted to the mantilla of Point d'Alençon not to perceive the disappearance of its wearer.

"I wonder what's the matter with her?" said she; "finds it too hot, perhaps."

"May be the smell of the flowers," suggested Olivier.

"Well," resumed the Duchess, casting a glance in the direction of the Sphinx's now empty seat, "I didn't think they, of that class, were so nervous. Why are they called *filles de marbre*?"

And then, after a momentary pause,—

"I suppose it's not the nerves, only the hearts that are marble."

And then they talked and laughed on, and conversation became, by turns, general, or relapsed into asides, and it was late when the pleasant group broke up.

"You may give me a lift in your brougham, Olivier," said M. de Moranges, as, having parted from the ladies of their party, he found himself standing by his nephew's side on the asphalte of the Champs Elysées; "my carriage is gone home with Claudine."

Olivier accepted with readiness, and drove his uncle to the Rue de Grenelle. They spoke little, and, what they did say, related to the new ballet which was just then in rehearsal at the opera, and to the difficulty of obtaining good pointers.

When the Marquis de Moranges was inside his own doors he inquired for both Claudine and Mlle. de Mourjonville, and was informed that both had retired for the night, and were asleep. As he was assured by Madame's waiting-maid that her indisposition had been nothing to speak of, and merely an effect of the heat, he did not think it necessary to interrupt Mademoiselle's slumbers, which he would otherwise have had

small scruple in doing, but left her to repose in peace.

But peace was not precisely the grand desideratum in our friend, Aspasia's, so recently and so widely-opened eyes. What she was bent upon was conviction, and she set to work with all the sharp cunning of her nature.

Never was anything so sisterly as the care lavished by her upon Claudine during their drive home. The latter, having partially recovered from the first shock before she was placed in the carriage, was merely struggling with the oppression and breathlessness that so frequently follow these kind of attacks. Her memory was still somewhat dim as to the immediate cause of what she was suffering; and she alighted at the Hôtel de Moranges, and, supported by Mlle. de Mourjonville, tottered into her own room, before the clear and distinct sense of what had passed re-appeared before her mental vision. But it did re-appear, and then the natural consequence of all such emotions in women manifested itself in another attack.

The sagacious Aspasia had at once dismissed the lady's-maid, saying that "Madame, whenever she had such attacks as these" (it was the first she had ever had in her life), "liked best to be alone;" that she (Mlle. de Mourjonville) was used to attend upon her in such cases, and that, in fact, the patient would be fast asleep in a quarter of an hour. Aspasia said this in such a quiet, pleasant way, and it was so particularly agreeable to the abigail to be left to her own devices,

and released from any performance of any duty, that she, in her own mind, voted Mademoiselle a sensible person, and one with whom it might, perhaps, be possible to live.

Aspasie let the nervous attack have entirely its own way, merely undoing all strings, ribbons, and ligatures, establishing the sufferer comfortably on a sofa, and opening windows so as to let in air.

When the paroxysm was over, and exhaustion showed that it was so, she prepared a glass of *eau sucrée*, with essence of lime and orange flowers in it, and gently bathed with Eau de Cologne the head that lay back, inert and pale, upon the sofa cushions.

Claudine's breath went and came imperceptibly between her half-closed, slightly coloured lips, and her eyelids were shut as in sleep, while a dark blue circle hollowed itself beneath each eye. Prostration was complete. Aspasie touched the cold wrist; the pulse was barely perceptible; and not fussy, but watchful as a cat, she glided softly round her prey, seeking for the spot whence she could best pounce morally upon it.

Her first move was to impress upon her half-unconscious hearer her own complete and absolute want of suspicion.

"It was the worst of those hot, crowded places under the trees of the Champs Elysées," she said; "they invariably produced faintness" (she had herself had so many of these attacks, she knew so thoroughly well how to deal with them)! "*Tilleul* was the only thing quite sovereign;" and she obtained the swallow

ing of a few drops of her cordial. Then she touched the hand again; the pulse was still very weak. She put a bottle of English salts at a convenient distance from her patient's nose. "It was such tremendously hot weather, too, for the season; so unwholesome, she wondered anyone could bear it; she herself had felt very unwell for several days past. The greatest wonder of all to her was, however, the extraordinary physical strength of fine ladies; they went everywhere, did everything, turned night into day, but did not rest during the day; and yet they were always fresh and strong. How did they manage it?"

"Only see that Madame de Varignan, for instance," she added; "she's as blooming as a rose (not that I think her so handsome as do some people), and I dare say never had a fainting fit in all her life! So self-satisfied, too, as she looks! so insolently happy!"

The pulse on which Aspasia had laid her finger while thus speaking gave a little sudden start, and beat intermittently.

"Fine ladies have a fine time of it," continued Aspasia, dropping the hand she had held, as, moving to a table that stood before a glass, she began to mix some lemonade for herself, while watching the recumbent figure of her friend in the mirror. "Fine ladies have a fine time of it, in truth; they have all the pleasures of wrong and all the privileges of right; they lay hands on whatever suits them, and nobody ever cries out about stolen goods; and they abuse the poor, unfortunate women who happen to have hearts."

She had turned round, and whilst uttering the last words, she stood in front of Claudine, whose face was bathed in tears.

"What has happened?" she exclaimed, with such an accent of innocent surprise; and springing forwards, she, with a burst of irrepressible sympathy, well nigh smothered Claudine in her arms, overwhelming her with marks of her tender commiseration, and imploring pardon for the wounds she had been blindly, unconsciously inflicting.

"I had not the slightest notion," she cried; "not a guess: if I could have had the faintest idea of such a thing," (of what, *Aspasie*?) "I would have died sooner than say a word."

"*Aspasie*?" asked Claudine, suddenly drying her eyes, dashing the hair from her brows, and fixing a look of fire upon her companion; "do people think her so very beautiful?"

Mlle. de Mourjonville had measured the depth of anxiety in the look, and, after a moment of apparent reluctance at having to avow a painful truth,—

"Yes," she replied, "she is thought in her world a great beauty; indeed, quite irresistible." This was uttered in a low, regretful tone.

Claudine sat upright, gazing steadfastly at her friend, who was kneeling on a cushion beside the sofa, and with quivering lips and nostril, and a brow knit in wrath like the *Medusa's*,—

"Do you believe she is his mistress?" asked a voice, hoarse with anger and dread.

The glance with which Mlle. de Mourjonville took the entire aspect of the woman before her was a short one, no longer than a lightning flash, but it told volumes.

"No," said she, deliberately, and, as it were, driving a nail home with one knock.

"No?" echoed Claudine, her whole countenance passing through half-a-dozen different expressions in a second.

"No," repeated, stoutly, Aspasia, and, this time, a smile of superiority, of triumph, almost wreathed her thin lips.

The two women were locked for a moment or two in a slight embrace.

At the end of that time.

"And Monsieur le Marquis?" suggested Aspasia; "how is he to be told? Am I to have the honour of——"

But Claudine had started to her feet, and stood pale and trembling, a very picture of alarm.

"Hush!" she whispered; "for God's sake, hush! he must never know: I would rather die!"

"Oh," remarked Mlle. de Mourjonville, arching her eyebrows, and feigning astonishment; "so you go in for concealment, do you? that will be no easy matter."

Claudine joined her hands in earnest entreaty.

"Aspasia," exclaimed she, "you must help us; you will promise, will you not? You will swear never to tell M. de Moranges?"

"Oh, yes," rejoined Aspasia, with a singular expression; "I will promise never to tell him—till you wish it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Dust in the Eyes.

IF our wily friend, Mlle. de Mourjonville, saw that, by this new complication of Claudine's passion for M. de Beauvoisin, she became what French politicians call the master of the situation, she also perceived, at the same moment, the intersection of difficulties in which it suddenly placed her. There was fortune on all sides, and one false step, or one unlucky chance, might destroy it. For the false step, Aspasia thought she could answer that it should not be taken by her. But as far as the unlucky chance went, there was no saying what might not happen.

The Dowager might be brought, Aspasia believed, to a very large contribution, if it were proved to her that her brother's fortune was definitively snatched from the grasp of the Sphinx; but the bare notion of Olivier being the instrument destined by Providence to prove Claudine's unworthiness to his uncle, tore the entire web to pieces. It cut two ways: first, if ever it were so much as guessed at by M. de Moranges, not one farthing of his money would ever find its way to his lawful heir's purse; and the Dowager herself would be far more terrified at the idea of her son's infatuation than at that even of her brother's.

So far, then, the combination was a very unlucky one. But Mlle. de Mourjonville was a remarkably cool-headed person, who, like a good general, seized all the various aspects of a position at once, and was not easy to disconcert. She was resolute exceedingly; despised the thousand and one petty phantoms before which it is the habit of continentals (men and women) to be forever quaking; rose at once to the requirements of the position; and took in all its different bearings at a glance.

Claudine was in love with M. de Beauvoisin—that fact must be accepted and made the best of. Claudine's entire unreserved confidence must be secured, the total ignorance of the Marquis de Moranges must be compassed, and upon those two bases a comparatively quiet state of things being established, some wise scheme must be invented whereby later to loosen the bonds between the Sphinx and M. de Beauvoisin. For the moment, Aspasia saw clearly that any jealousy or disquietude on Claudine's part would lead to some violent explosion which would reveal all to M. de Moranges, and deprive her, Mlle. de Mourjonville, of her legitimate share of profits in the concern; therefore, there should be no outbreak of any species, she argued: *i. e.* no occasion afforded for one. She determined to take time into her counsels, and trust somewhat to the fickleness and frivolity of man's (and woman's) nature.

"Let her have her toy;" she mentally reasoned, "and tire of it!"

What puzzled Mlle. de Mourjonville not a little,

was the absolutely frightful anxiety evinced by Claudine that M. de Moranges should suspect nothing. This anxiety seemed to outweigh almost the passion for Olivier, whilst at the same time identifying itself with it. Aspasia was at fault, and for that reason proceeded cautiously; but she clearly saw what a hold the dread of discovery gave her over the Sphinx, and this cord she grasped firmly.

"Madame de Varignan has one great advantage over you," said Mlle. de Mourjonville to Claudine, as they were sitting together a few days after the scene in the Champs Elysées; "she can see as much of him as she chooses."

"She seems to be always with his wife," rejoined Claudine. "What an extraordinary thing that in their world women seem to have no jealousy."

"Why should they?" retorted Aspasia; "the sort of sentiment they are taught to have for their husbands, when they marry, is of such a very calm description that how it could, by any possibility, engender jealousy would indeed be a miracle."

"But, Aspasia," continued Claudine, drawing her chair nearer, and leaning forwards with her elbows resting on her knees, "what is the difference in reality between them and us? We are, after all, the same flesh and blood,—we lead the same lives,—what real difference is there? Do you think they are better than we are?"

"I should say considerably worse," replied Mlle. Mourjon, with a malignant smile; "besides, if there are

any what are called good ones among them, nobody runs after them—they are left to sit by themselves in a corner.”

“It is just that I can never understand,” continued Claudine; “there is Olivier’s wife; she is what people call good.”

“She’s not tempted, that’s all!” interrupted Aspasia. Claudine shook her head. “No! no!” added she; “she’s good, and I know it.”

“Stuff!” exclaimed angrily Mademoiselle Mourjonville; “she’s not had time yet to know whether she’s good or bad—wait a year or two, and you’ll soon see she’s no better than the others—everybody’s the same.”

“No! Aspasia, that’s not what I meant when I asked where was the difference? There is a difference between Madame de Beauvoisin and us, and I don’t mind it. I don’t mind her being good, it doesn’t hurt me; but what troubles me are the other women, those like that horrid insolent Duchess” (and her whole countenance darkened with hate). “Why is it that a woman like the Marquise de Beauvoisin can go about all day long with her, and look in public as though she was her dearest friend; and yet, if I was to come against her in the crowd, she would take up her gown to prevent its folds from touching me! What is the real difference between Madame de Varignan and me? that does trouble me, and I never can make it out.”

“Why, there is but one; that she is Madame la Duchesse de Varignan. You need seek no further—that will do.”

"Well, I know," said Claudine; "but then why do the priests always tell you that we are all equals, and that sin only makes the difference? I feel it isn't true, and yet I hear them always saying it every time I go to church."

"Don't go to church," said, tartly, Mlle. de Mourjonville. "It's a very bad habit in your position."

"Well, sometimes it's a comfort," suggested Claudine, meekly; "and then, Monsieur le Marquis seems to think it proper."

"Oh! Monsieur le Marquis, Monsieur le Marquis!" grumbled Aspasia; "I am perfectly certain you will not be able to carry on this system of deception much longer. Why not make an effort, and get over all this nonsense about Olivier? it would only be the affair of a week at most. Get plenty of amusement during that time, or tell the doctors to send you to some watering-place for your health—it would be easy to do, and you would be free again in no time."

"I cannot," answered Claudine, in a low tone, but quietly; "it is beyond my strength to try and break with Olivier."

A little later M. de Moranges entered the room, and after a few phrases exchanged with Claudine and her lady-in-waiting, he inquired what their plans were for the evening.

"As M. le Marquis dines in the country," responded Mlle. de Mourjonville; "Madame had thought of taking

a box at the Gymnase, and going to see the new play, with M. de Vivienne, M. de Mauriac, and M. de Nesves."

"Florestan de Nesves?" asked the Marquis, sharply, and then with a smile that seemed somehow premeditated, "he dined here the day before yesterday," added he, "and went to the opera in your box last night."

"You know, M. le Marquis," observed blandly Mlle. de Mourjonville; "M. le Comte de Nesves was so *very* kind the other night at the Champs Elysées when Madame fainted; he was so very *empressé*; and called here the next day."

"And has been here every day since," added M. de Moranges; "Well, you had, perhaps, better write a line to my nephew, about to-night; get Olivier to go with you, too, to the play."

"The Marquis de Beauvoisin being a married man, of course one does not quite feel so authorised to dispose of his time," argued Aspasia, with delightful propriety, and preparing to write the note.

"Oh! married, married," repeated M. de Moranges; "what does that signify? Olivier will always do anything for me," and giving a glance at his watch, he prepared to leave the room, but turning round before shutting the door; "Florestan de Nesves is a sad Don Juan," observed he, with a laugh, "you must be upon your guard, or people will talk."

"Oh! Monsieur le Marquis!" exclaimed Mlle. de Mourjonville, with a profound expression of offended purity, and M. de Moranges was gone.

"We have found the *paratonnerre* at last," whispered Aspasia, as she turned towards Claudine, who sat still, looking uneasy and pale.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A Discovery.

CLAUDINE'S desire to keep M. de Moranges in the dark, which so much puzzled Mlle. de Mourjonville, is not, after all, very difficult of explanation. To her, the state to which M. de Moranges had raised her was the realisation of a fairy tale. At first the sensation was a comparatively vague one; pleasant at all times, though uncondensed in any specific shape. But when the hour came, when the woman awoke, all these brilliant aspects, all these bright, fair, outward semblances of life, meant one thing only: the possibility of charming Olivier!

It was not so long since that she had been poor, dirty, abject; she remembered it well, remembered it not with her memory alone, but with her imagination heated and heightened by passion. Every now and then when the evidences of luxury blazed around her in flashing lights, in dazzling mirrors, in crystals, and gold and silver plate, when every sense was solicited and flattered by what boundless wealth alone could procure, a shadow would darken all to the eyes of Claude Raynal's daughter, and a chill would pass over her that made her limbs quiver. She saw again that pale, dirty, draggle-tailed girl, crawling along the wet

road, with her feet crying *plash! plash!* in her shoes, and at those moments she dared not look at Olivier, for she was certain he remembered it too. She heard the sentence he had passed upon her:—

“The poor are always ugly!”

He had said it, and condemned her with the words. Therefore she would not be poor.

Often, when all were at rest in the *Hôtel de Moranges*, this girl would get up, and with a small lamp in her hand, steal away to her wardrobe, an apartment set aside on purpose for the reception of whatever appertained to her outward attire.

It was a large room furnished all round with alternate glasses reaching from floor to ceiling, and presses of pale straw coloured satin wood. On either side was a smaller room, in which in various drawers, cases, or boxes, were kept the jewels, besides the less voluminous articles of mere toilette, such as bonnets, ribbons, laces, flowers, &c. In the larger room there were the dresses only.

Here then would Claudine repair, in the middle of the night, and locking the doors inside, light all the tapers which illumined the central room, and pass the solitary review of her forces, of the auxiliaries which were to secure her against the desertion of her handsome lover.

She would open press after press, and spread forth to view the damasks and satins, and velvets, and oriental stuffs that were to keep out of sight the

phantom of the starving girl in the old torn grey shawl.

"Feed her!" had said Henri Dupont—who had admired her! even then admired her!

She would let the rich draperies drop, and scrutinise the rounded outlines of her neck and arms, and a smile of satisfaction would involuntarily curl her lips. Yes! that work was done; she had been fed and she was beautiful! but the costly attributes without which the modern lover sees no fairness in beauty's very self, they must be there also, or she would become as nothing in his eyes.

This was the secret Aspasia could not fathom: this was the chain that bound Claudine so indissolubly to M. de Moranges.

He was her beauty! he was her power! without the glory which he gave her, she would forfeit Olivier's love. M. de Moranges stood between her and the repetition of the sentence: "The poor are always ugly!" and then, unseen by mortal eye amidst the splendours of that illuminated chamber, she would fold the precious stuffs to her bosom, crush the falls of ancient Alençon between her fingers, and rapturously kiss the gems which she fastened flashing upon her arms. She was safe! Olivier could not choose but love these priceless unparalleled signs of wealth! and these signs of wealth bore name the Marquis de Moranges.

Mlle. de Mourjonville could not, for the life of her, unravel the enigma, but saw clearly that to the suc-

cessfulness of the plan for deceiving M. de Moranges was somehow attached the whole soul of the Sphinx.

The resources of her genius soon quieted her as to any danger of detection by her employer, but she was not long without anxiety as to what regarded M. de Beauvoisin. One or two slight incidents served to mark, as she thought, a desire on his part to escape from the entanglement into which he had (perhaps unintentionally) been drawn, and this had each time been the signal for such an explosion of despair on Claudine's part that the sagacious lady-in-waiting felt she must quickly secure to herself the same hold over M. de Beauvoisin that she had over the Sphinx, if she were not prepared for the ruin of all her combinations.

A party to Fontainebleau had been organised with the (now) inevitable M. de Nesves, and Olivier, at his uncle's request, had promised to take care of Madame Claudine (the Marquis abominated expeditions of this kind), when suddenly, the day but one before the appointed time for the pic-nic, Olivier announced the impossibility for him to join the party.

It was at the Hôtel de Moranges. A large dinner had been given, and all the *salons* were opened. The master of the house was playing billiards with an ambassador newly arrived in Paris, in whose honour the banquet had been given, whilst in the room where the piano stood were gathered several young men, amongst whom were Florestan de Nesves, Henri Dupont, and M. de Beauvoisin. Conversation flagged. Claudine's silence was habitual, but there rested a shadow on her

pale face and gloomy eyes that seemed to spread over all those who surrounded her. Our friend, Aspasia, too, was thoughtful and uncommunicative, and when not observed, concentrated all the intense sharpness of her gaze upon Olivier.

She had asked him with the most insinuating of voices, whether "nothing" could make him alter his determination touching the party to Fontainebleau, and he had alluded to his mother, as though some dire decree of that undisputed puissance baffled him, and forbade his pleasure.

Claudine was besought to sing, but said she could not, which seemed true.

"M. le Marquis," suggested Mlle. de Mourjonville, to Olivier, "suppose you favour us with *La chanson de Fortunio*; it is one of your triumphs."

And so Olivier did, and very well indeed he sang it. In the middle of the praise he earned, when a moment's silence was secured,

"No one ever sang that so well since Camille Leblond," vouchsafed Aspasia, in the clearest tones of her remarkably clear voice. "Did you learn it from her?"

M. de Beauvoisin had slightly started at the first words, and then sat immoveably still; but try what he would to hide it, a keen observer might have noted a change in his countenance.

"I—I don't think I ever heard her sing it," he replied, with some hesitation.

When tea was served, Mlle. de Mourjonville, choos-

ing a moment when Olivier was standing alone, turning over the leaves of a music-book, approached him and most gracefully handed him a cup. Their eyes met, and under the momentary look, commented by a remarkably singular smile that Aspasia gave him, the young Marquis blushed crimson.

"You did not know," said she, sweetly, but not releasing him from the hold of her eye, "that Camille was my half-sister, did you?"

M. de Beauvoisin turned very pale, and when the party to Fontainebleau was again spoken of, he said he would positively try to get over his engagement to his mother.

"What it is to be so clever!" remarked a young gentleman just budding forth into the world; "see how Mlle. Aspasia does what she likes with Beauvoisin."

Claudine was radiant.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Monsieur le Marquis.

At the time when our tale opens, the Marquis was fifty-five, and looked his age. Neither older nor younger, but what a strong healthy man at that age should look.

He had been from his boyhood remarkably handsome, with always the beauty fitted to his age of the hour. At fifty-five he was the handsomest man of his time, and looked a king. He was tall and portly, rather stout than otherwise, as a man in the middle of life should be, if the weight he has borne already have not weakened him, and he is still ready for the load that coming years will impose.

Full of grace and dignity, at his ease with all men (and women), from potentates to peasants, the Marquis de Moranges was, to a philosophical observer, one of the chief studies which the higher classes of Paris society could offer to him, for he bore witness to a state of things, and to a race unrecalled by anything that the present epoch has to show. Look at him as he sits his broad-chested, firm-footed, glossy coated weight-carrier in the Bois; see how he sits, one with his steed, enfleshed, as it were, upon the noble brute; mark his elbows, his knees, and his hand! All is close (nothing rambling), and all is steady, tight-fitting, sure, and

neat. Look at him in a *salon* where men are assembled, who love to talk, and listen to him there. His words are so many evidences of a state of culture which is gone, but in which was embodied France. Whether it is irretrievably gone, time will show.

Such as he is, royal looking as Charlemagne, (but the Charlemagne of the period of the *Capitularies*) stately, active, energetic, full of intellect and will, does M. de Moranges, at fifty-five, mature only, ripe, unmarked by one defect brought on by age, does this man seem a fitting subject whereupon a woman should try to practise deceit?

That a woman should do so—and above all, she who is nothing more but a mere woman only—seems out of the nature of things; but how about self-deceit? Might this man not deceive himself? Has his maturity left him no secret of his being unrevealed? Or are there in him undeveloped springs whereof he is himself unsuspecting?

Of that portion of the human organisation, known by the name of the heart, M. de Moranges was utterly ignorant. Perhaps if one was to incline towards the over-technicality of this age, it might be hard to define what is really meant by the term, applied as it perpetually is to things wherewith it has absolutely nothing to do; but something must be granted; therefore we will assume that the word heart means the medium through which the tenderer affections are felt; the chief element of unselfishness in man. This it was whereof the magnificent Marquis knew nothing.

Some men let their hearts (or what they take for granted as such) lie about, so that they come to be picked up and laid down again twenty times within a twelvemonth, by which process they are rendered considerably weaker, but not better, although these kind of men aspire to being deemed tender-hearted.

Others there are, who shut their hearts up, or fancy they do so, decreeing that they shall be put away, got rid of, for fear lest they should one day be troublesome or inconvenient, as though it lay within the power of a man to come to a compromise with his Maker, and escape from this or that portion of his complete humanity!

Now, Maurice de Moranges was still one of the king's pages, and had not quite attained his fifteenth year, when his precocious wisdom, prompted by a strangely developed love of self, came to the conclusion that perfect devotion to self was safer and pleasanter than devotion to anybody else.

It was a narrow creed, and a mistake; but M. de Moranges had not yet discovered this, at fifty-five. He had lived with the truly beautiful in art, until, by dint of forging the fine ore of his nature, his perceptions had reached a degree of refinement, where the exquisite, the perfect, alone can satisfy. And he thought that a mind, thus accustomed to the lovely, could altogether do without what is conventionally termed the heart, and associate itself with senses ministered to by the impure.

When the Marquis first appropriated Claude Raynal's daughter to himself, he did so with the intention of fashioning her to his taste, of educating her, and, in a certain degree, creating her anew. But he, over-learned as he was in all the phenomena of life, even he, had committed a tremendous mistake, for he had counted without the vulgar element, without the inferior nature that would rise no higher than its own level.

The Marquis was not long in finding out the difficulty of giving the direction he desired to his pupil, but, though disappointed on this point, his vanity was amply satisfied on others, by the celebrity soon achieved by the Sphinx; and extremely pleasant it became to him to reflect upon his envied proprietorship of this universally admired person.

But the impossible—that, namely, which he and whosoever knew him would have declared impossible—came to pass (as it so often does) and M. de Moranges' placid vanity, that calm, serene surface which nothing had as yet ruffled, was disturbed.

M. de Moranges supposed that love had awarded to him whatsoever was in its gift, and that about love he had nothing left to learn! The exact contrary was the truth. Love had given him nothing, and of what is in reality love, he was more ignorant than a school-girl. Maurice de Moranges had been loved too early and too much to have acquired even the alphabet of the science of loving; that sad, sweet, sacred science, never wholly mastered but through misery and through the subordi-

nation of self to the beloved. Neither do I mean to assert that it is in such natures as his ever to achieve the greatness of a real passion, but it is in all men to suffer, and the unknown is a terrible enemy.

Since the day when heaven only knows what mysterious vibration in Claudine's now passionate voice had jarred upon some secret fibre in the Marquis' complex being, and stirred emotions lying slumber-locked till then, his perfect quietude was disturbed, but pleasantly so; and remembering the numerous episodes of his gaily mis-spent youth, he began to foresee a repetition of them with the Sphinx.

The disturbance was but a slight one, and the selfishness remained untouched: so thoroughly so that, when in the Champs Elysées, M. de Moranges saw Claudine fainting before his eyes, the emotion caused by that event was so slight as not to be worth mentioning. He was perfectly satisfied by the accounts he obtained of her health when he reached his own house, and had the goodness before dropping off to sleep, to think complacently over several plans for future pleasures graciously shared with Claudine—perhaps even a journey to some German watering-place; though it might be better after all to let her go there alone if her health required it. Well! all that might be settled at leisure: there was no hurry. Claudine belonged to him absolutely, to do what he chose with; but it was pleasant to think that she was becoming more attractive to him, her proprietor; that she had all at once found a voice that charmed him, and was be-

ginning to sing in a way that said something even to him! All this was agreeable, and he slept peacefully upon it.

But the next day the roused emotions suddenly condensed themselves into a new form. A name was uttered, a shock was given, and the recently-touched fibres vibrated to a different tone. This time it was an unpleasant vibration, but connected—as, according to some theories, are dreams—with the memories of by-gone events.

When Maurice de Moranges was a page, the Comte de Nesves (father to Florestan) was a reigning Don Juan of the time, and he it was who had been the occasion of the first severe lesson taught the boy, whose renown was later to eclipse that of all former conquerors. Of what he had done Nesves never guessed the importance, but though Moranges easily grew to despise the lesson and its cause, he never pardoned the giver of it. He had all his life disliked the name of Nesves, and it grated upon him harshly when Aspasia (who knew nothing of the past) pronounced it.

Like all his family, M. de Moranges was brave to excess, and he forthwith invited Florestan de Nesves to his house, and opened its doors to him just as his grandfather plunged into the movement of '89, in order to prove to himself that he could fear none.

But the jarred fibre went on jarring, and the anxiety endured. He breathed uneasily, as though there were some oppression at the heart. The heart!

as if it had not been got rid of ages ago! got rid of? who knows? Kept out of sight? yes. But could it by any chance have taken to beating again? The very notion was preposterous—nay, humiliating—and the Marquis trampled it down scornfully.

CHAPTER XXX.

Cross Purposes.

M^{LE}. DE MOURJONVILLE felt herself armed at all points, save one. She had a hold over Claudine which she knew to be irresistible. She had a hold over Olivier which she thought he would not resist, and, indeed, since the moment when she informed him of her close connection with the cause of his youthful follies, she had had no complaint to make of M. de Beauvoisin. He was docile in the extreme, though he evinced a certain disquietude of manner whenever he happened to be left alone with her. With the Dowager, the practical Aspasia felt most of all at her ease, and relied upon her own resources for giving to that alliance an indissoluble firmness. It was with her own immediate employer, only, that the lady-in-waiting could not exactly make out her position, and what was its weakness or its strength. Yet this was, after all, the most important part of the whole scheme; for, necessary as it might be to have subjugated Claudine and Olivier, and secured the Dowager, the necessity of remaining certain of her establishment at the Hôtel de Moranges was paramount to all others. With one word the Marquis could scatter the threads of her combinations, well-woven though they were, to the winds. He had but to grow the least in the world dissatisfied

with her, and her utility was at an end. Of what use could she be to the Dowager if she were dismissed from her post as companion to Claudine?

M. de Moranges, too, was the reverse of a man easy to manage, as it is termed, nor was clever management in this case a thing called for, or in any way feasible. Mlle. Aspasia might manage M. de Beauvoisin and Claudine, and to a certain extent, the sharp Dowager herself; but in what shape could management of any kind be applicable to the head of the house, whose deputy housekeeper she was? She was his servant—there was no denying that; and the instant in which he should esteem her services less than he now apparently did, would be the last of her rule. If for the double of her salary (which was high) M. de Moranges could find a person suiting him better, he would engage that person, and Mlle. de Mourjonville would be deposed. Not all her regularity, not all the economy she was capable of introducing into certain branches of the internal expenditure, nothing of all this would weigh one feather's weight with Moranges. He liked regularity and punctuality, but for economy cared nothing; on the contrary, some of his friends said there was such a deep rooted after-me-the-deluge feeling in him that he preferred waste to anything in the shape of saving. No—it all depended on one thing only, on the mere fact of suiting him. Hitherto Aspasia knew that she suited him; but she also awoke to the consciousness that, upon continuing to suit him, hung all her chances of existence.

Destiny helped her, but without her being thoroughly aware that she was helped.

When she first mentioned the name of M. de Nesves to the Marquis de Moranges, it was altogether without a purpose that she did so. It was his manner of receiving the communication that inspired her with a purpose; for, impenetrable as he was renowned for being, the imperceptible something which flitted across his features at mention of that name, suddenly revealed to Aspasia's singularly sharp perceptions an advantage that must not be allowed to escape.

She had secured her lightning-conductor, as she triumphantly announced to Claudine, and the great thing now was, so exclusively to attract the lightning to this one object that it should not let its flashes play round any other in the neighbourhood. It was an excellent contrivance, and showed favour on the part of Providence towards that struggling and superior individual, Mlle. de Mourjonville.

Claudine learnt her lesson well enough, as it simply implied passivity on her part, and Florestan de Nesves (who was no genius) was well-received when he paid his court to the Sphinx. M. de Moranges himself so completed the plan, that no more was left for the ingenuity of others to achieve. He persisted with such disdainful ostentation to invite M. de Nesves, that our friend Aspasia determined to risk a very bold stroke, and feign concern for her employer's dearest interests. She hinted one morning, when accidentally alone with M. de Moranges, that perhaps M. de Nesves came

rather often to the house; that his reputation was not quite such as to warrant, &c., &c.

But she was cut short somewhat harshly.

“What can I possibly have to fear from such a goose as Nesves?” had M. de Moranges replied with a haughty stare.

And Aspasia was considerably comforted, for she had made a step towards finding out what was passing in her employer’s inmost soul—no easy task.

This mode of braving any notion of rivalry on the part of M. de Nesves, of despising him, was so different from the sudden manifestation of uneasiness that had escaped M. de Moranges on first hearing Florestan’s name mentioned, that Mlle. de Mourjonville felt her employer was playing a part, was disguising himself; and that he therefore had something to hide. Besides this, too, she had evinced such a vigilant solicitude for his interests, and it would be so easy at any moment to expulse the unsuspecting Florestan from his earthly paradise, with a prodigious show of flaming swords, that our friend Aspasia had really every reason for congratulating herself upon her good luck, as well as upon her cleverness.

Destiny was about to put another capital card into her hand, but she knew nothing of it yet. She simply went her way with the known, leaving the unknown to take care of itself, which it did—taking care of her at the same time.

Mlle. de Mourjonville, about this period, informed the Marquis de Moranges that Madame Claudine’s

health was thought to require a little more walking exercise, and the Sphinx and her lady-in-waiting were accordingly wont to indulge in long walks in the forenoon. Sometimes a carriage conveyed them to the Bois, leaving them there to accomplish their pedestrian excursions unattended; sometimes their rambles led them into the streets of Paris, with the easily admitted object of shopping.

M. de Moranges was far too thorough a grand seigneur not to believe in what was told to him; so that opportunities were not wanting, whether for Claudine to meet the person she sought, or for Aspasia to concert measures with those whom she aspired to turn into instruments rather than allies.

It was towards the middle of June, and matters were progressing well, and the last interview Mlle. de Mourjonville had with the Dowager had shown that lady satisfied with what had been achieved. She had heard of the attentions paid by M. de Nesves to the Sphinx, for while her brother imagined himself to be the only individual in the world in whose mind a shade of suspicion had been aroused, and while all his efforts were directed towards preventing any one else from guessing at these vague suspicions of his, the entire crowd of his habitual associates were beginning to talk between themselves, and to chuckle and laugh over the probable fate of the kingly Marquis de Moranges, who alone was completely ignorant of what was passing out of doors.

"It is extremely lucky that it has fallen out as it

has done," had observed the Dowager, at the close of the interview above alluded to; "nothing could have been more opportune."

Now, these words, lucky and opportune, had an unpleasant sound, and conveyed an unpleasant sense to Mlle. Aspasia's ears, and she rebelled, and distinctly stated that there was not an atom of luck or opportunity in the whole business, but that she, Mlle. de Mourjonville, and she alone, was the planner, deviser, and, in short, creatrix of the entire situation.

A few seconds sufficed to put these two women on their guard, one against the other. Mlle. Aspasia had alarmed the rapacity of the Dowager by boasting too much of her marvellous services, and thereby letting it be inferred that the reward she would claim might be disproportionately high, and the elderly Marchioness, in the sudden awakening of what was with her a master passion, had allowed the true niggardliness of her nature to peep forth, and had disquieted Aspasia upon the amount of her gains, which she fully intended should be large. Each woman had betrayed herself; which is what mostly happens when persons of decided moral inferiority concert together for an evil purpose.

"The Dowager is not sufficiently in my power," was the form of internal speech in which Mlle. de Mourjonville's convictions on parting from Madame de Beauvoisin condensed themselves.

"That creature must be squeezed dry as an orange,

and then thrown aside," was the deliberate conclusion of the Dowager upon that same occasion.

Which of the two rival powers was in the end to outwit the other, we shall see later; meanwhile, one or two of those infinitely small things occurred, whose insignificance is such that no one ever dreams of reverting to them as the cause of more weighty events.

Since the diplomatic conference to which his sister had summoned him a few weeks previously, M. de Moranges had held no further communication with that lady, whose dictatorial genius had, as we know, never possessed any attraction for him. He was more than ever pleased to have Olivier about him, and engrossed a very considerable portion of his nephew's time.

"I am afraid I shall have to give up my pleasant habits of life soon," said M. de Beauvoisin, in a hesitating kind of way, one evening, as he lounged about after his usual gracefully purposeless fashion in one of his uncle's apartments.

"Why?" inquired the uncle, with active anxiety; "does my niece mean to make you go to Barèges with her? She is ordered there, is she not?"

"Oh, that is all changed now," rejoined Olivier, with increasing embarrassment; for he had had time to remark the sudden pallor on Claudine's face, and the lynx-like look fixed upon his own by Aspasia.

"That is all altered; it is not Claire." (Beauvoisin named his wife in this spot, which his uncle never did; it was the difference between the two generations.) "It is not Claire," he added; "it is my mother. Claire

is no longer going to Barèges; we are all going to Beauvoisin next week."

"What for?" pursued M. de Moranges. "It has never been your custom to go down there before the autumn. What is to make the difference this year?"

The steady fire of Mlle. de Mourjonville's eyes (she was seated at a table behind M. de Moranges,) never ceased for an instant, and Olivier felt that his very bones were being searched by the gaze of those terribly ironical orbs.

"Well," he replied, not daring to look any way at all, "the difference is made by what, to me, is most supremely disagreeable: by the sudden disappearance from the world of old Carpentier, and by the decision come to by the government to let the election take place in the second week in July. It is in yesterday's *Moniteur*."

M. de Moranges tapped his forehead with his hand.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed; "the deputation! Yes, I remember all about it now; and there is no help for us. Your mother will leave none of us in peace. But I thought there were to be no elections anywhere till November."

"So we all thought," said Olivier; "but some fancy seems to have seized our lords and masters, and the election is to take place directly; as I have told you, in the second week of next month."

"Well, my dear boy, what must be, must be," observed

his uncle. "And however great a bore the whole thing is, count upon me; I will give you every help I can."

"And so Monsieur le Marquis is about to become the deputy for Savre-et-Merle?" insinuated Mlle. de Mourjonville, as, somewhat farther on in the evening, she handed him a glass of iced orangeade.

It was such a gentle tone in which the words were uttered, and such a look the speaker of them sent creeping all over the man she addressed! However, there was seemingly no unpleasantness between them, for they talked together a great deal that evening, without perceiving how intently they were watched by the master of the house.

A couple of days later, M. de Moranges had an interview with his sister touching the matter of the deputation, on which she was so intent. At its close,—

"Adèle," said he, "you know I really do like Olivier—I like to have him about me—he's not bright, but he's safe, I have convinced myself of that—thoroughly safe! which is saying a vast deal as times go. Now, I should reproach myself if I did not give you a hint that may be useful. Perhaps it would be wise to beware of Mlle. Aspasia—you know who it is I allude to." The Dowager nodded assent.

"There is no danger in mere beauty for Olivier," propounded the experienced Marquis,—(oh! the vanity of all mere experience!)"—"he has a surfeit of that at home; his wife is certainly the loveliest woman in

Paris, but a clever woman, a very clever woman, like Mlle. de Mourjonville, may be dangerous to him. I show my anxiety for the well-being of our family by speaking as I am now doing, for the loss of that woman would be a terrible loss to me, a dislocation of my household indeed; but if you agree with me in thinking there may be danger, I will send her away directly."

"Not for worlds, Maurice! not for worlds!" retorted his sister expressively. "I know what the value of that kind of person must be to you—in your peculiar circumstances—" and she looked demurely down; "and I would not deprive you of her under any consideration."

"Remember! I have warned you," continued the Marquis. "But if you are sure there is no danger—"

The Dowager smiled.

"None!" she rejoined.

"Olivier is not clever," opined her brother, shaking his head.

"No!" retorted she; "and that will save him. It is always your over-intelligent imaginative men who get ensnared and carried away. I have taken good care Olivier should have no imagination; but thank you all the same, dear Maurice."

This was the new card Destiny had been putting into Mlle. Aspasia's hand without her guessing it.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The Circular.

It was the middle of June, and the work of re-election of a deputy to fill the place of the defunct M. Carpentier was fixed to take place in the second week in July. There was no time to lose, for, although the government had not put forth its candidate, there were one or two men, as we already know, in the department who might, by setting their shoulder to the wheel, succeed in attracting to their efforts the support of the entire administration, namely both the central and the purely local.

"You are perfectly sure of the bishop, mother, are you not?" asked Olivier of the Dowager, as they sat, some seven or eight persons gathered together in conclave, in the so-called library at Beauvoisin, convoked for the express purpose of deliberating upon the circular the young Marquis was to address to the electors.

"Sure of the bishop?" echoed the Dowager. "Well! some people say one must never be sure of any one, but I fancy we are sure of the bishop; what do you say, Monsieur Tarbet?" she added, turning to a little, fat, bald-headed man, who sat at a table somewhat behind her chair, busily looking through his spectacles at some account-books. He was the family notary.

"Whether Madame la Marquise can rely on Monseigneur?" questioned this individual, shoving his spectacles down to the extreme edge of his nose, and looking over them; "I think so, though there is a good deal to be said; Monseigneur is a native of hereabouts."

"I knew him vicaire, and afterwards curé of Malleray," interrupted the Comte de Clavreuil, who was present on this occasion, a fine, tall, not intelligent-looking man of fifty, with all the remains of that remarkable beauty which bloomed forth in the face of his youthful daughter Claire. "I knew him," he continued, "a perfectly good royalist, a right thinker; that was six-and-twenty years ago. My cousin Jean, to whom Clavreuil then belonged, took an interest in him, and helped to get him patronised by the then bishop, who gave him the parish of Malleray. It was in the days of Louis Philippe, and the French clergy thought rightly then; our present bishop got this first step of his owing to the ardour of his legitimist convictions, but he is, as M. Tarbet says, a child of the soil, and has all his family in the department."

"All his family don't amount to much," rejoined the notary; "there's his aunt Piedefer, who lives at St. Martin, and was a cook thirty years back, and has saved money; and two old spinsters still at Malleray, very poor, and of whom he takes but little notice."

"And you forget the curé of—"

"Belespoir," put in Henri Dupont, who had promised not to leave Olivier till the affair of the elections

was decided; "the man who in the end will always make the bishop do what he likes."

"True," replied the notary, "I had forgotten the curé of Belespoir!"

"But I had not," observed the Dowager, with a quiet smile; "and I think we shall be able to count upon him."

"Take care of the Vivienues," suggested Count Dupont. "Belespoir is the parish of Mont-Vivienne, and Vivienne's grand-uncle is Archbishop of Chantilly."

"I mean to give a set of bells complete, and restore the belfry of Belespoir," said the Dowager, with considerable self-satisfaction.

"They can do more than that," pursued Dupont. "Reflect that their archbishop is close upon ninety. Now, what the curé of Belespoir is looking to, is a coadjutorship, and then, everything else: the cardinal's hat, the archbishopric of Lyons, Paris—everything in short."

M. de Clavreuil turned upon his heel.

"What a country!" he muttered; "in which a shoemaker's apprentice can become what my father's uncle was proud to be." (A Clavreuil had been Archbishop of Lyons before '89.)

"And in which the son of a Corsican notary can sit on the throne of St. Louis!" retorted Henri Dupont, in the same key, but with a look of sly jubilation lurking at the corner of his eyes.

"Not the same throne," said, hastily, M. de Clavreuil; "certainly not that."

"Certainly not, M. le Comte," answered Dupont, with mock gravity; "something quite different: an inverted drum, if you like, covered over with velvet torn from the hangings of Versailles; but answering the same purpose, all the same."

This was a parenthesis in the general conversation.

"Suppose Olivier were to read us the circular he means to send out," suggested the young Marquise, who was seated at a window, bending over an embroidery-frame.

"Have you got it there, mother?" asked M. de Beauvoisin, stretching out his handsome figure lazily in his large arm-chair, and leaning his handsome head more lazily still upon the chair's back.

The Dowager laid her hand upon some loose sheets of paper by her side.

"Well, mother dear," added, blandly, the future legislator, "you wrote it, so you may as well read it."

"Hush, hush!" interposed the Dowager, "that is all very well, quite between ourselves, as we are at this moment, but, my dear Olivier, if you enter on a political career, you must really learn to have a little more self-reliance."

("Who is to teach him this, Madame la Marquise, I would beg of you to inform me?")

I am not quite sure that a rapid glance of Claire's beautiful eyes did not mutely convey some such demand as the above, but it was not noticed.)

The Dowager took up the sheets of paper we have alluded to, and tendering them to the notary,—

“Read, Tarbet,” said she; and that functionary, seemingly honoured by the command, settled his spectacles, put his left hand into his waistcoat, and looked as if he thought himself about to harangue some hundreds of his attentive countrymen from the top of the tribune:

“Electors of the department of Savre-et-Merle,” began the little man, “it is as the successor of a long line of ancestors, all devoted to our common country, and to the sacred cause of order, that I present myself to you, and openly acknowledge the hope that you will choose me as the champion of your interests in the legislative chamber——”

“Beg pardon, Madame la Marquise,” interposed a well-to-do-looking personage, who had till then been silent, “but they won’t like that, hereabouts; they’ll say it’s making too sure of them.”

“Well,” rejoined the Dowager, rather huffily, “the word hope appears to me happy, as not implying the security which, of course, we naturally feel.”

“Do you?” mumbled the former speaker (it was the medical practitioner of Malleray, a man of enormous influence), shaking his head. “Do you? I’m delighted to hear it; but you have to deal with very queer people—people who nourish the most extraordinary illusions about their rights, and the Lord only knows what all besides. If it goes against you to say that you solicit the favour of their suffrages” (M. de Clavreuil bounded

upon his chair), "strike out, at all events, the open acknowledgment of your hope; they won't like it: I know them. If you absolutely hold to hope, qualify it by uncertainty; say you venture to hope."

"But, S—, doctor," broke in M. de Clavreuil, forgetting, in his indignation, everything else so utterly as to swear, just as though he were still amongst his comrades of the *garde du corps*, "What is the use of submitting to the empire if we are to curry favour with the populace, as in the days of the red republic?"

"There is no reason whatever for submitting to the empire, Monsieur le Comte," replied, quietly, the doctor, taking a big pinch of snuff, "if you can help it. And excuse me if I say that what you are pleased to term the red republic, never has had any day at all; at least, *yet*," he added, with a marked emphasis (like a privileged person as he was).

"No, but it will have very soon, indeed, if all your villanous modern theories go on being propagated."

"Pardon, pardon," replied the doctor, "what is it you and we all want? we want our excellent young Marquis here to be a deputy, and you are all good enough to think that in some portions of the department I can help his election. Now, if you are taken suddenly ill and send for me, you have the condescension" (there was a slight touch of irony there that made Henri Dupont hide a smile by bending down over the table), "the extreme condescension, let me say, to follow the advice I give. You take my remedies, and have done so now for twenty years: but if I am

to help you in this new sphere, you must follow my advice here too. I know these people; you don't. They don't like you as it is, which won't prevent them from electing a deputy from amongst you, because there are others they like still less. They don't like you, and, if you don't know how to manage them, they'll avow their dislike."

"But surely, my dear Robichon, we pay court to them enough!" exclaimed, bitterly, the Dowager.

"In many respects, a vast deal too much; and far more than is needed," rejoined M. Robichon. "But you invariably fail in all your attempts to make them think you don't wish them at the bottom of the sea. It is the way of doing it, that you have not got, somehow."

"Perhaps the evil is incurable?" suggested Henri Dupont.

"Perhaps it is," responded, slowly and gravely, the doctor; and then reverting suddenly to his former half-bantering tone: "I don't like to think any evil incurable, young man," said he; "it ain't in my nature. When I got Mademoiselle Claire, yonder,—I beg her pardon, Madame la Marquise!—when I got her out of her typhus fever, ten years ago, I didn't do it by thinking her incurable."

"Dear papa-doctor," murmured the young Marquise, with one of her sweetest looks directed full at the old man's face. "You know that was what I called you all the time."

"Yes, and that's why I allowed myself to speak

my mind so entirely to you all—even to you, Madame,” he added, turning round towards the Dowager, and bowing. “You are following the old traditions of your class, which have always brought you to grief. You will persist in fancying that everything that occurs is in some way meant by Providence for your especial benefit: there is the mistake. You fancy the empire is made for you; now, the empire is made for the emperor first, and next, for a set of people with whom you have nothing in common. Then you fancy that the so-called masses must be charmed to see themselves represented by the illustrious names of ancient France; whereas, they are absolutely ignorant of ancient France; and where not ignorant, hostile.”

“Allow me to differ totally from you, my dear friend,” exclaimed the notary, who had still his left hand in his waistcoat, and wanted to be delivered of his address. “Allow me to differ totally from you. The people of France have been blinded, ill taught, but they ask no better than to be led back into the right road.”

“Whew!” whistled the irreverent doctor; “that will take a deal longer time than we have to give to the election before us. However, try it.”

“Meanwhile,” interrupted the Dowager, who thoroughly well knew old Robichon’s influence throughout the entire department, “suppose we modify the first phrase, and say we venture to hope.”

M. de Clavreuil protested by indistinct grumblings.

“Read on, Tarbet,” continued the Dowager.

"—The sacred cause of order," proceeded the notary, "is the common cause of all Frenchmen; and that cause can never be surely upheld, fought for, victoriously maintained, save by the time-honoured possessors of the soil, by the long-descended families whose names are identical with——"

"The devil!" cried out the doctor, jumping up from his seat. "Do you seriously believe that I, or any other reasonable being, can do any good with a circular of that kind? No, thank you, I'll go home, and look after my patients, and not mix myself up in any such inevitable mess."

Much to the disgust of all present, the young Marquise was leaning back in her chair, indulging in a fit of irrepressible laughter at old Robichon's outbreak, and in this was joined by Count Dupont, who, when the first vehemence of the doctor was a little calmed, ventured to hint that the constituted authorities themselves would rebel against the tone of Olivier's circular.

"From the prefects down to the very game-keepers, you would have them all up in arms," said he; "they lay claim to be the only guardians of order."

"And the clergy?" retorted Robichon; "do you suppose you could be sure of them? Why, they'll always betray even the throne-and-the-altar party for the administration of the hour, because that said administration has more in its gift than anybody else."

"If the clergy did not support *us*," ejaculated M.

de Clavreuil, dramatically, "they would be false to their faith, as was St. Peter."

"For which he was forgiven," muttered Olivier (very bright for him!).

"M. le Comte, M. le Comte!" roared out old Robichon; "since when is the legitimist party identical with God Almighty?"

"What is that noise?" asked the Dowager, as a great commotion was heard outside; voices, wheels, doors opening and shutting, and steps resounding along passages. "Ring the bell, Tarbet, and see what it all means."

But the man of deeds and documents had no time. The door from the vestibule into the billiard-room and through to the library opened, and the Marquis de Moranges entered.

"Thank heavens it is you, Maurice," cried his sister; "we are all at sixes and sevens here, but you will set us right at once."

"I've nothing particularly pleasant to tell you," remarked M. de Moranges, with a smile, and exchanging very affectionate greetings with his lovely niece. "I've driven over from Brunoy as fast as possible to inform you that the government is going to put forth a candidate, and that candidate is——"

"Who?" burst from all voices at once, even from the soft tones of the young Marquise.

"As if the quickest way to know was to interrupt one," said, contemptuously, M. de Moranges. "So like women, that; and, faith! men too:" and he shrugged

his shoulders. "Well, then, the government candidate is going to be Vivienne!"

"Impossible!"

"It's a joke!"

"Well played!"

"A hidden trump!"

"It can't be!"

"I always feared it!"

These were a few of the tumultuous expressions that ensued.

"What, Gaston?" demanded the Dowager.

"No," retorted her brother, "the Duke himself."

"The Duke?" thundered M. de Clavreuil.

"Isn't he sufficiently devoted to the sacred cause of order, M. le Comte?" inquired, ironically, old Robichon.

"By thunder, what a piece of treachery!" was the furious reply he got.

"The bishop's at the bottom of it all," opined M. Tarbet, rubbing his bald crown, which had become hot.

"I thought you were quite sure of the bishop, mother," urged, reproachfully, Olivier.

"Stuff about the bishop," retorted M. de Moranges; "it's the curé of Belespoir has done it all, with the prefect."

Henri Dupont stopped in the lounge he had been taking up and down the library while the talk was hottest.

"Oh," said he, pursing up his lips, and laying one hand on Olivier's shoulder, "the curé of Belespoir, is it? Well, then, never mind, old fellow; what is done may be undone yet."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Government Candidates.

THE news M. de Moranges had brought was an ordinary occurrence enough. Until the hour when the government, having definitively chosen its candidate, announces him in the *Moniteur*, and instructs its provincial delegates, the prefects, sub-prefects, and mayors, to announce the said individual as the official candidate, until that hour, the declaration of such or such a person having secured the government support and patronage is one of the most approved manœuvres for or against those who have presented themselves as independent.

Now the department of Savre-et-Merle was not one touching which the government had any pre-conceived design; and, for anything which had yet been determined, the election would turn on the merely local influences of prefects, sub-prefects, and landowners.

At the eastern extremity of the department stood Combeville, the post town of Clavreuil, and where M. de Clavreuil would, had he cared for it, have reigned, but he did not care for it. M. de Moranges, as we know, put it otherwise, and was wont to employ the formula, "Clavreuil is a fool!" upon all occasions.

The sub-prefect of Combeville therefore had not much to fear from the Clavreuil faction.

At Malleray, as we know, the mightiest influence was Beauvoisin's, and that influence had become incarnate in the Dowager. But this was recent.

Four or five years ago the real influence in the whole department had been vested in the person of Count Dupont de Laporte, the father of Olivier's friend Henri, and proprietor of the fine domain of Breuvières, which lay to the north-west, behind Beauvoisin, obliquely towards Mont-Vivienne, and was important equally to Malleray and Brunoy both. He had been four years dead.

His son had done nothing to perpetuate the paternal influence, for, having spent his early youth in times subsequent to those which had tempered the mettle of his father's nature, and made political strife his element, Henri Dupont looked at what went on from afar, and rather more as a philosopher than as a politician. He had been a great traveller, having lived in the East for three years (eight years ago), and visited India on his father's death (which was a severe sorrow to him), and spent a twelvemonth in America at the period of M. de Beauvoisin's marriage and journey to Italy.

Henri Dupont had seen too much of the world at large to be able to take delight in the steeple-interests of a department, wherein the first booby, or the first rogue who wins official favour, may lord it over the grandest intellect and noblest character in the whole nation. He really loved his country, believed in her,

abstained from action, watched, and hoped. Vulgar observers set down Henri Dupont as an Orleanist. He was nothing. It might be, perhaps, nearer the truth to describe him as what alone a Frenchman can be who despairs not of France: namely, a republican.

The fortune of the Duponts was very large, and identified with more than one force in the nation. In Savre-et-Merle they possessed two considerable estates, stretching over almost the whole distance between Malleray and Mont-Vivienne; in Normandy they were extensive proprietors, as also in the environs of Paris; and in railway property old Dupont had been one of the earliest and largest holders. Henri Dupont was famous as an agriculturist and cattle-breeder, and carried off prizes without end, and wherever his name was mentioned it was so with respect for the exceeding uprightness and loyalty of his character. Between his father and the Dowager there had been a life-long friendship in spite of all political differences, for they were neighbours, widowed early both of them (it had been said even that they would end by marrying), and from Count Dupont the Dowager Marquise consented to accept advice.

At Mont-Vivienne, too, Henri Dupont was ever a welcome guest, and at Brunoy: whereas at Clavreuil he was ignored. The political feeling there was of a species that eschewed compromise, and once only in his life had Olivier's best friend been received by the parents of Olivier's future wife. This was a few days previous to Henri's departure for America, and just

after the first preliminaries of the marriage treaty had been opened between the realms of Clavreuil and Beauvoisin. He had ridden over to Clavreuil one day in December, and been presented to the Countess by Olivier, but he barely caught sight of Claire, whom her mother managed to exile from the drawing-room. When the visit was over, and the two young men were preparing in the stable-yard for a hard ride back to Beauvoisin, so as not to keep the Dowager's dinner waiting, a singular vision, as we know, crossed their path. On Olivier's mind it left no impress: Henri Dupont never forgot the face he then saw, and the strange beauty of the hungry girl was instantly recalled to his memory the moment he found himself, fifteen months later, face to face with the universally-admired Sphinx.

Henri Dupont was not actively an influence in Savre-et-Merle; but it was, at the same time, an article of faith everywhere that, if he chose, the government would do anything in the world to win him over: as yet, he had not chosen. His acquaintance with the prefect was of the most purely negative kind; and, as to the sub-prefects, he passed them over with polite disdain.

Now, how stood it with M. de Moranges? He was, in fact, not of the department. The Moranges were settled in Auvergne for the last five centuries (their origin was Burgundian, before the first Crusade, but they had migrated), and the Brunoy property had been bought during the restoration by Maurice de Moranges'

mother. The dominion exercised, however, by the Marquis over his surroundings was an undeniable one; and, had he presented himself as a candidate, he would have carried the entire department with him: nothing could have resisted him. But this was a purely personal influence, and rested on social supremacy, and Parisian repute.

At Mont-Vivienne, which occupied the whole north-western extremity of the province, was a stronghold of what might easily have been—but never was—independent authority. The Duc de Vivienne, a hale sportsman (and little else) of sixty, was in the enjoyment of something like twelve hundred thousand francs (nigh on fifty thousand pounds sterling) a-year; yet his usual predominance in the county was utterly disproportioned to such resources as his fortune supposed. The Viviennes had no political opinions whatever. They patronised legitimism, because that was the proper thing to do; but they were, in reality, only clerical. Out of the temporal power of the Pope, and the subjection of every other power in France to the jurisdiction of bishops, they cared for nothing. They were instruments in the hands of any member of the clergy who should take the trouble to play upon them.

There was in their near neighbourhood just such a member of the clergy as this. No sooner had the news arrived of M. Carpentier's illness, than the curé of Belespoir had resolved on becoming coadjutor of Chantilly. No sooner was the breath fairly out of M. Carpentier's body, than all his attacking forces were in

the field, but called up so quietly, that no one was a bit the wiser.

The curé of Belespoir was the bishop's nephew; and the bishop was a sworn ally of the Dowager. But the thing was to be managed quite differently; the Duc de Vivienne was to be transformed into a government candidate (not quite identical with an official one), the prefect was to support him through thick and thin, and all imaginable lesser intrigues of sub-prefects, or any subordinates whatever, were to be trampled upon.

The curé of Belespoir triumphed completely. He secured his candidate, and the government support; and the news brought by M. de Moranges was very near being the truth; but the curé of Belespoir had overlooked one or two extremely small points of detail, as will sometimes happen with ambitious schemers on a grand scale; and these almost invisible points lay at the root of what grew to be disappointment and failure.

What the curé of Belespoir had overlooked we shall see later.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Two to One on the Black.

THE curé of Belespoir had acted, as ambitious churchmen often do, without sufficiently taking into account the forces that would be opposed to him. When he had persuaded the prefect and detached his uncle the bishop from the Beauvoisin party he regarded victory as certain, and overlooked what he would have styled insignificant opponents. Now, of these opposing forces two were incarnate in human bodies, and had name on the one side, Henri Dupont de Laporte, on the other, Marius Daudel, the sub-prefect of Malleray; and besides these two tangible obstacles there was the anonymous and incoherent force, yclept the chapter of accidents, which has so much to say in the crises of human life! All these the haughty churchman scornfully overlooked.

And now he resolved to embark upon an enterprise somewhat more difficult than that of persuading the Duc de Vivienne to put forth his candidature for the députation; upon that namely of inducing the Dowager of Beauvoisin to withdraw hers.

A few days after the meeting for the drawing up of Olivier's circular, the curé of Belespoir made a visit to Beauvoisin. It was a beautiful day; breakfast was

just over, and in the drawing-room, into which the ecclesiastic was ushered, the two Marchionesses were seated, whilst Olivier made believe to read the newspapers just brought in by the post. The Dowager was busy with the perpetual white wools, Claire was playing with her child, who lay rolling on a Turkey carpet spread out for him on the floor, whilst a tall, handsome woman watched at a little distance, respectfully, the infant pleasures of her nursling. The sun came in, softened through the thick foliage of a clump of trees, right in front of the window opening upon what might have been an English lawn.

When the first greetings were over, the curé, having seemingly made up his mind that boldness was the only policy, broached the subject of the elections with an appearance of frankness that was not without a certain charm. He was a handsome man, that curé of Belespoir, with graceful gestures, an agreeable voice, and good manners, and he thought himself certain in the long run of doing what he liked, even with the Dowager Marquise; so he made a speech about the necessity of union in the party (!) and the dangers of the church, and the duty of sacrificing everything to the defence of the temporal power of the Pope.

"I am thoroughly of your opinion," said the Dowager, "and, when our circular appears, you will, I think, be satisfied with it."

"It has not yet appeared?" interposed the curé, blandly.

"We expect it to come home from the printer's to-night," added Olivier.

"Madame la Marquise," recommenced the churchman, after a pause of a few seconds, and as though he had resolved upon the accomplishment of a difficult task, "let me appeal to your strong, nay, almost masculine sense of patriotism—to your well-known political convictions, and, above all, to the fervour of your Christian zeal. It is a sacrifice I come to ask, and that is why I ask it. No one has for years done more good to our sacred cause than you have; do not imperil that good by an ill-advised act" (the Dowager knitted her black brows)—"by an act that will neutralise all our long-persistent efforts—do not divide this already much divided province—do not weaken the defenders of our holy religion—do not give our enemies the spectacle of our dissensions—do not contest the election of the department with the Duc de Vivienne."

The Dowager laid down her wools, and compressing her thin lips looked the curé through and through with her sharp black eyes; but, compressed as were the lips, and sharp as were the eyes, he thought he detected behind all these an imperceptibly wavering purpose.

He was preparing to follow up his arguments, when his design was opposed from a quarter he had not yet taken much notice of; Claire, leaving her boy to his nurse, had come forward and was leaning one hand upon the table in front of the curé.

"I beg your pardon, M. l'Abbé," said she, in a

sweet, clear voice, "there is no difference in the religious convictions of the two candidates; you may rely upon M. de Beauvoisin's Christian zeal as thoroughly as upon that of M. de Vivienne; but there is a question of engagements taken, of responsibilities accepted and incurred, of friends compromised—a question, in short, of honour, and my husband cannot recede from the contest—it is too late."

"Bravo, Claire, bravo!" exclaimed Olivier, with unprecedented energy, and throwing away his newspaper: "bravo! that's just what it is, and you're quite right."

The situation was a thoroughly altered one, and one for which no one present was prepared.

The Dowager would now, in her inmost soul, have gladly given the whole thing up, for she did not care to see suddenly arise before her this new spirit in her daughter-in-law, this spirit which she had only vaguely guessed at, when she warned Madame de Clavreuil of the possible difficulty of managing Claire.

In Claire a sudden feeling had burst forth; the revolt of a high-minded upright gentlewoman against the petty arts of an intriguer. Perhaps the old teachings of Mrs. Griffiths prompted her, but she determined that, the first time in his life when her husband was about to take a step in public life, he should take it courageously and not flinch from the word he had once given. Her son's father should behave like a gentleman; and all the knightly blood of the old narrow-minded, unintellectual, but immaculately honour-

able Clavreuls, boiled over within her, and she did what was to be done.

As Claire stood upright there between those three, draped in her white robes, quivering with the strong vibration of the honest purpose within her, glowing with the flush of beauty her sudden energy lent her, she was an object of amaze to all.

The Dowager was amazed and hated her; the curé was amazed, and feared her; Olivier was amazed and thunderstruck by his wife's loveliness.

(It was not then too late for this ill-joined pair—but it was not to be!)

Claire was alone against her adversaries, but she had the best of it notwithstanding, and they felt this, though she was not so sure.

When help came to her from Olivier she was glad, very glad.

"I have but spoken in your name," said she, turning to Olivier with a look of unconscious but irresistible sovereignty; "but I have spoken your thoughts, have I not?"

"Every word my wife has said is exactly what I feel, and I will act up to every word of Claire's," rejoined Olivier, with a vivacity quite unusual; nor was he wanting in dignity as he spoke. When he had spoken, he came towards his wife, took her hand and kissed it, looking at her in a manner that made her blush deeply and lower her eyes to the ground.

The curé was vanquished, and, man of the world as he was, he gave a graceful air to his defeat, and

when after discoursing upon other subjects he took his leave, declining to stay to dinner, he parted from all his opponents in apparently undisturbed friendship.

It was evident the curé had overlooked the young Marquise in his calculations. However, it was a fight now, and would have to be fought; so he must nerve the prefect for the contest.

As he left Beauvoisin he inquired from the footman who opened the carriage door for him, whether Count Dupont de Laporte was still staying at the château, or whether he had returned to Breuvières?

"He left suddenly for Paris several days ago," was the reply.

"Oh!" That was all the curé of Belespoir remarked; but he said it again to himself as he was rolling along on the road, and it was a meditative long drawn out "Oh."

When the curé of Belespoir left Beauvoisin, he gave orders to the driver of the hired vehicle in which he had come there, to drive back home, namely, to Belespoir, which lay not far from Brunoy. Anybody might have heard him give this order. But, when he had passed the park-gates and emerged upon the road, he stopped the carriage, and told the coachman to turn his horse's head round, and drive to Malleray.

Half-an-hour later the stately churchman, who had caused himself to be set down at the door of the curé of Malleray might be seen, wending his way on foot towards the sub-prefecture. The sub-prefect was not at home, but the conseiller de préfecture was, and with

this young aspirant for administrative honours the curé had rather a long, and we will therefore hope, a useful conversation. It was late in the afternoon when the curé fairly set out on his home journey towards Belespoir, and the last place where he had called in Malleray, was at the sub-prefectorial printing-office. He staid there for about a quarter of an hour, closeted with the director of the establishment, and about an hour after he had left, the conseiller de préfecture also paid a visit to the said director and held private converse with him.

The subject of their interview seemed to have been a pleasant one, for when they separated both appeared internally amused by some happy fancy.

"It is the story of the oyster over again!" said the printing-office director, as he parted from his visitor; "each of these clericals will get a shell, but we must mind that we get the oyster!" And both men chuckled as they shook hands.

We should like the reader to have a precise notion of the time that had been required for the events we have related in the last two or three chapters.

It was the third week in June when the Dowager marshalled her household troops down to Beauvoisin, and prevailed upon her brother to spend a short time at Brunoy in his nephew's interest. She believed Olivier would in reality walk over the course; the Duc de Vivienne nourished exactly the same belief as regarded his own candidature, and this is easily explained by the un-importance attached by the govern-

ment to the election. M. de Laprunaey had not come forward, no one quite knew wherefore, and Achille Bouvier, the attorney's son at Combeville, had been held back, no one quite knew by whom. He had been for a long while held to be the one serious candidate; therefore, he not presenting himself, the course seemed tolerably clear. The government was indifferent, the prefect slow; each aspirant kept his own counsel, and thought he could rely on the same supporters whereof his rival felt also sure—so that, till their antagonism was declared, the antagonists went to work, each for himself, and full of hopeful illusions.

It was on a Tuesday that had been held at Beauvoisin the gathering we have described for the purpose of drawing up Olivier's circular. On the Wednesday this document was carried to the printing-office by Henri Dupont de Laporte, who left Beauvoisin that day not long after dawn, and passed through Malleray, having to gain Chartres in time for the uptrain to Paris, whither he had suddenly decided to go. He had, as we have said, very large estates in the neighbourhood of Paris, and there was nothing extraordinary in the fact of his presence being required on matters of private business.

But a week had gone by and not only Count Dupont had not returned, and had not written to anyone since he left, but it was impossible for the people at Beauvoisin to get the printed copies of Olivier's circular. It was on the Wednesday that the curé of

Belespoir had paid his visit to the château, and, as we know, the circular was not yet out, but positively expected for that very evening—when it did not come.

Delivered over to the printer on the Wednesday, it had been promised for the Saturday, then deferred till the Tuesday (Sunday and Monday being no days); then it was faithfully promised for the Wednesday, and then, on an impatient demand sent on the Thursday morning by the Marquis de Beauvoisin, the answer made was that such an unusual stress of business had been laid on the workmen by the voluminous reports unexpectedly sent in from the Conseil d'Arrondissement and Municipal Council (concerning financial matters) that it had been impossible to execute private orders; a delay of a few days was besought. It was no use being angry or impatient, it must be borne.

There was no circular out from Mont-Vivienne either, for the curé of Belespoir, once aware of the Beauvoisin candidature, hoped to neutralise it, as we know, and did not wish, if possible, to have to avow any dissension in the Conservative party.

When he had seen, however, what was likely to be the resistance opposed by the rival candidate, and when he had overcome the first surprise caused in him by the energy and decision so suddenly shown by the young Marquise, the curé became aware of the necessity of publishing without any delay the address of the Duc de Vivienne to the electors. Needless to say that this profession of faith was entirely composed by the Curate-Dean himself.

Early in the morning of the day but one after the curé's visit to Beauvoisin, this document was also deposited in the hands of the director of the sub-prefectorial printing-office at Malleray, and a verbal assurance was confidentially given by that functionary to the bearer, that the copies for distribution should be ready within forty-eight hours.

END OF VOL. I.



Early in the morning of the day but one after the
 curé's visit to Beauvoisin, this document was also de-
 posited in the hands of the director of the subpre-
 fectural printing-office at Malesherbes, and a verbal as-
 surance was confidentially given by that functionary
 to the bearer, that the copies for distribution should be
 ready within forty-eight hours.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.



Blaze de Bury, Marie

Love the avenger

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